Thought into Being

Finitude and Creation

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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Abstract

This thesis is a response to the increasingly widespread belief in the potential for technology and modern science to enable finite subjects to overcome the essential limitations constitutive of finitude and, hence, subjectivity. It investigates the truth and extent of such claims, taking as its focus quasi-miraculous technological developments in neuroscience, in particular Brain-Computer Interfacing systems and cognitive imaging technologies. The work poses the question of whether such emergent neurotechnologies signal a profound shift beyond receptivity and finitude by effectively bridging the gap between interiority and exteriority. Organised around a quadripartite division, the thesis pursues this idea firstly with regard to the act of artistic creation; secondly through an exegesis of Kant's account of the *original* or infinite creativity of the Supreme Being; thirdly through readings of Freud and Jung and their respective models of the psyche; and finally through an interrogation into the possibility of telepathy and the various ways in which it can be conceived. Each chapter thus takes place as an extended thought experiment, exploring the consequences of a seemingly unprecedented proposition that promises to eradicate the finite gap between internal and external. This is followed to the limits of conceivability before asking in each case whether we may in fact need to rethink the very premises around which each proposition has framed the problem.

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Introduction

Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God.

– Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*[1]

We often hear predictions about the alarmingly transformational future in store for subjectivity, given the unprecedented leaps made over the last two and a half decades in genetics, neuroscience and computing, as well as anticipated advances in nanotechnology and robotics. The rate at which previously insurmountable deficiencies and frailties are routinely overcome, and new powers or capabilities are granted, suggests to some observers that there is no inherent biological limitation that cannot in principle be transcended.[2] However, rather than corporeal appendages which increase strength, enable greater motility, or supplement the functioning of our perceptual organs, or advances in biomedicine that promise to eradicate disease and slow down the ageing process, our interest in the present study is in technological advances which promise to augment the faculty of *thought itself*. Our aim is to interrogate the seemingly unbreachable limits of finitude, and the irreducible gap or interval between the subjective interiority of thought and the positive exteriority of reality, and to consider whether any technological intermediary could conceivably enable us to traverse or even close altogether this gap. It is primarily a question of whether a supplementary prosthesis could allow thought or consciousness to exceed itself, and what the implications might be were the abyssal gulf between mind and world, and between one mind and another, to be annulled.

[1] Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, 1930 (Standard Ed. 21) p. 21.
[2] See for example, Joel Garreau, *Radical Evolution: The Promise and Peril of Enhancing our Minds, our Bodies – And What it Means to be Human* (New York: Doubleday, 2005.)

The devices that are the occasion for these reflections are well-documented, rapidly advancing neurotechnological systems that, through opening a direct communication pathway into the brain, seek to facilitate an immediate psychical intervention into reality, thus bypassing physical actions and potentially removing all mediation between intention and act, possibility and actuality, thought and being. We will ask whether the faculty presented by such devices, which will be outlined in our first chapter, amounts to a form of spontaneous creative activity that as such would surmount the receptivity central to human finitude. Furthermore, if this is so, what would be the consequences of such an 'overcoming' of finitude and how is it to be conceived? Could any instrumental agent enable us to attain this true immediacy, where the 'in here' would coincide with the 'out there' without any delay or mediation? Or alternatively, can the relationship between thought and being be reconsidered such that there would be no gap to overcome? These introductory remarks will simply sketch a broad overview of the work as a whole, providing a chapter-by-chapter summary of what is to be addressed. Since each division is largely autonomous, while all constellating around the same set of questions, it may prove helpful at this stage to get a sense of how the central narrative unfolds.

Chapter One: As our point of departure we will situate these questions in relation to artistic practice, where this 'gap' will be considered with regard to the relation between the artist's idea or inspiration and the resulting object. The process of realising a 'mere idea' as a physical object or event can often be a troubling one, where compromises must be made and problems negotiated. The possibility

promised by the technologies we will be considering, in potentially allowing for a piece of work to be willed into existence and for the idea or intention to emerge fully realised as an object, thus seems to fulfil the familiar dream of many practitioners by effectively circumventing the practicalities, limitations and disappointments that intervene between conception and execution. So would such a bypassing of physicality, of the necessary struggle to translate an idea into reality, facilitate a more 'direct', true or faithful realisation of this idea? However, as John Dewey writes, '[the] act of expression that constitutes a work of art is a construction in time, not an instantaneous emission',[3] so bearing this in mind how would such a development impact upon the act of artistic creation? What *kind* of creation would we be dealing with? In addition to this, would the liberation from the requisite physical expertise enable just *anyone* to access previously untapped reserves of creativity that had been unable to find expression?

Besides, how stable and clear-cut is this distinction between the idea and the physical expression? After a brief examination of certain pertinent aspects of Kant's philosophy of art, and Hegel's critique of Kant, we will then turn for the bulk of the chapter to the aesthetic philosophy of Bendetto Croce, which, while no longer commanding any of the influence or prestige it once enjoyed, still has a claim to our interest and, so I will suggest, presents us with a uniquely productive paradigm for envisaging what we are potentially faced with. This reading of Croce is pivotal to the argument of the opening chapter and will implicitly underlie much of what follows in subsequent chapters.

[3] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Pedigree, 2005) p. 67.

Chapter Two: This is followed by a more 'fundamental', ontological discussion in the second chapter, where the central problematic of the entire thesis is brought into clear focus. Here is where the question of finitude is explicitly posed for the first time, by systematically pursuing the consequences of an extraordinary, but thoroughly undeveloped, remark by Slavoj Žižek. As will be seen, Žižek boldly declares that the capability granted to us by these same neurotechnologies we are interested in amounts to what Kant calls *intellectual intuition*, a faculty hitherto considered to belong only to the divine mind of the Creator. While finite cognition is a derivative faculty, for which the object must be given in a receptive intuition, the divine intuition is said to be an *original* one whose objects spring forth from the cognition itself. The infinite mind of God, since it cannot be dependent upon an external object to which it must conform, is therefore *creative* rather than *receptive*. However, with the apparent prospect of closing the finite gap between inner and outer, and the possibility of giving body to the merely subjective contents of the mind, are we, as Žižek suggests, on the threshold of attaining to this divine, productive faculty?

Our approach here, then, is one of methodically picking up the pieces after this somewhat cavalier pronouncement, and attempting to come to terms with the fallout from this astonishing prospect.[4] In doing so much of the chapter is devoted to providing a detailed exegesis of the concept of intellectual intuition itself, and endeavouring to conceive of what it might mean were such a capability to be made available to finite beings. After all, the surpassing of finitude is by no means seen by Kant as something desirous; on one or two occasions he gives highly evocative

[4] In actual fact this sentence describes not merely the methodological approach of one chapter but accurately sums up the entire thesis, for it was this passage of Žižek's that provided the germ for all of the present research.

accounts of the disastrous consequences that would follow were we to transgress the limits of the finite. For since our spontaneity, freedom and creativity are conditioned by, and inextricable from, finitude, perhaps such a transgression, rather than conferring superior creative powers, would actually put this spontaneity at risk. We will appeal also to Heidegger's interpretation of Kant, and his privileging of the transcendental imagination, whose power of productivity or creativity must, however, be strictly distinguished from the mode of creation pertaining to an infinite intellect. After thus setting out the scope of the problem and the difficulties to be surmounted the argument will turn finally to Quentin Mellassoux's far-reaching critique of philosophies of finitude and consider what implications his intriguing employment of the term intellectual intuition could have for our enquiries.

Chapter Three: The third chapter then poses the question of what happens when we introduce the unconscious into the equation. Freud places great importance on a number of strict oppositional distinctions, such as the real as opposed to the unreal, subjective as opposed to objective, and internal as opposed to external; so would the technologies in question, by problematising such distinctions, lead to a reconsideration of some of the key concepts of psychoanalysis? We will consider initially the gap between a need or desire and its fulfilment, and speculate upon whether these devices, brought to their inevitable conclusion, would lead to a state of auto-satisfaction. Once again, however, despite how it might appear at first sight, the outcome may turn out to be far from advantageous. For just as Kant warns of the catastrophic cost of exceeding finitude, so here it may be the case that the

condition of instant gratification and total enslavement to the pleasure principle would paradoxically spell the end of pleasure.

Moreover, there may be profound implications for Freud's theory of memory, for it seems as if we are potentially on the cusp of supplementing our finite mnemic systems with technological memory-aids that would facilitate absolute retention, or total recall. However, we will have cause to question the implicit assumptions behind such a prediction, through calling on Derrida's readings of Freud and the famed 'Mystic Writing-Pad.' Following this we will return to the question of automatic wish-fulfilment and the opposition of fantasy and reality, probing Freud's theory of repressed desire, according to which the materialisation of that which we most desire, rather than bringing pleasure, would make us recoil in disgust. This will be related to the capability of brain scans to reveal latent dispositions and a discussion will ensue on the essential difference between what we *think* we want (or think, feel, experience) and what we *really* want.

For the second half we will return to the concerns of the preceding chapter and ask whether psychoanalysis may provide us with the means to rethink finitude and the inescapability of receptivity. Is this to be sought in the alleged 'timelessness' of the unconscious? Indeed, how is this latter to be conceived and does it amount to an exception to Kant's transcendental conditions of experience as Freud suggests? From here we will turn to the work of Carl Gustav Jung, in particular the short treatise entitled *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, where the monist or 'psychoid' ontology underpinning all of Jung's psychological work on the archetypes of the collective unconscious is given its most extensive treatment.

Through appealing to the holistic absolute that Jung terms *unus mundus*, we hope to undermine the interval separating thought from positive being and in doing so reconsider the relationship between subject and object set out thus far.

Chapter Four: Our final considerations will probe the concept of telepathy, prompted by experiments into the possibility of a technologically enabled form of brain-to-brain communication. Here we are ostensibly faced with the prospect of traversing perhaps the final unbridgeable gap of finitude: that separating one mind from another and confining us to individual egoity. We will ask whether a telepathic insight into the mind of the other could enable us to penetrate his or her innermost thoughts, thus bypassing the intermediary of language and profoundly transforming intersubjectivity. For language produces as much as it overcomes the distance between subjects, both enabling and disabling communication; however, can we truly speak of thought or subjectivity *prior* to language? Is there a stratum of selfhood that is indubitably mine and mine alone, undiluted by the universality and generality of language, and which the latter necessarily conceals? Through tracing an outline of Wittgenstein's famous 'private language argument' from the *Philosophical Investigations*, and a related passage from Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, we will explore this question as to whether there is an irreducible, singular kernel of *mineness* that withdraws from the universal, and follow the paradoxes to which it seems inevitably to lead.

In considering the possibility of a truly 'direct' form of communication that outstrips the universal, we will then ask whether, via technological means, we could conceive of telepathically communicating what philosophers of mind term *qualia*,

or the immediate 'what-it-is-like-ness' of an experience. Given the interconnectedness of all of our thoughts and experiences, can we envisage the possibility of extracting a moment from this horizon of associations and transmitting it to the other, such that he or she would immediately feel what we feel, short-circuiting the need for description? Furthermore, would this be an immediate presence of mind to mind without the recourse to a signifying utterance?

Going further still, could we speculatively conceive of a first hand experience of the other's subjective interior that is not thereby wrested back into *my own* experience? That is to say, rather than gaining an empathetic understanding into what it would be like *for me* to experience that which he is experiencing, could I ever probe the other's mind to such a degree that I could know – or feel – what it is like *for him*? But how can this externality, this otherness, be maintained *as* externality and otherness, without its being assumed and taken over by my consciousness? We will follow the intricate thread of these questions through readings of Husserl, Levinas and Derrida, and try to arrive at a form of telepathy that is not reducible to the simple communication of a message between an active and a passive agent, but which simultaneously maintains the distance between the subjects involved. We will conclude by returning to the question of *ownness*, attempting once again to locate the irreducible, singular core of subjectivity that would abstain from universality.

So in each case something extraordinary is promised and this possibility is followed to the limits of conceivability to consider whether such a promise can be fulfilled, or whether in fact we may need to rethink the premises from which we set out. As

such, each chapter resembles an extended thought experiment, pursuing the consequences of a seemingly unprecedented proposition. In order to help conceive of such outlandish possibilities we will often have recourse to certain apposite examples from literature and science-fiction cinema. Such examples, more than mere illustrative signposting, will provide us with models for how to think the possibilities we are faced with.

As a disclaimer, it should be made clear at the outset that while these considerations are motivated by particular technoscientific developments, and specific cases are addressed, what is at issue for us here is in no respects the capacity or capabilities of any given technological procedure. Thus it is not our aim to predict scientific developments, nor describe the mechanics and judge the efficacy of the processes that we will be considering. The technologies addressed in these pages are engaged with on an analogous level to the examples from fictional sources, that is, on a purely speculative conceptual basis. As such this work in no way attempts a 'scientific' approach to philosophical problems, nor does it contribute to the growing literature probing the philosophical consequences of developments in neuroscience. Furthermore, although admittedly there is a certain superficial kinship, this is resolutely not a work of 'transhumanist' futurology. Transhumanism is a form of speculative eschatological thought predicting and welcoming the potential of technology to profoundly transform and improve the human condition by overcoming suffering and reversing ageing, as well as boundlessly increasing intellectual capabilities through technological brain enhancements.[5] The goal of transhumanism is to usher in the 'post-human' age, where biological constraints

[5] Cf. Nick Bostrom, 'A History of Transhumanist Thought', *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (April 2005): pp. 1-25.

will be transcended and finitude definitively surpassed. However, while we will at times be speculating upon future developments and probing the consequences, unlike transhumanist discourses our enquiries here do not rest on scientific evidences or outcomes, for the question is whether *any* technological instrument could enable us to freely transgress hitherto insurmountable limits. Thus it is not strictly a question of technology as such, of its essence or its potential for transformation of the human species, but of these very limits themselves. Are there limitations pertaining to finitude that no technological instrument however advanced could surpass, regardless of what the advocates of transhumanism may predict; limits, the only surpassing of which would be the dissolution or dispersal of the subject, namely death itself?

After all, does not Adorno state that gaps are an essential precondition to thought? A thought that does not perform a break with what is, where there is no space between itself and the already there, would be mere repetition. For Adorno, a thought or an insight is born through 'the dense, firmly founded but by no means uniformly transparent medium of experience',[6] in other words the irreducible mediation and separation between the interiority of the subject and the exteriority of the actual. A pure adequation of thought to object, a divine insight into things, would thus simply reaffirm what is, and as such would fail to rise above the commonplace. Thought or knowledge, says Adorno, is 'mediated by the whole flow of conscious life in the knowing subject',[7] and this mediation is not something we must seek to overcome in the aim of ever greater objectivity, for this would effectively amount to thought's dissolution. So the inescapability of one's own

[6] Theodor Adorno, 'Gaps', *Minima Moralia*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005) p. 80.
[7] Ibid., p. 81.

individual point of entry onto the world (which is finitude itself), including 'prejudices, opinions, innervations, self-corrections, presuppositions and exaggerations',[8] that perennially keep us at a distance at one remove from an immediate grasp of 'reality', is in fact the enabling source of insight rather than its obscuring fog. This gap, or opacity, however, is essentially unjustifiable and thus always incurs 'a certain guilt'[9] or unpayable debt. However, the settlement of the debt, or the closure of the gap and the overcoming of finitude, would perhaps spell the end of thought itself rather than its elevation to ever-greater heights. In other words, the coincidence of interior and exterior could seemingly only come at the cost of losing one of the terms of the opposition.

What we hope to have achieved by the end of this work is a rigorous and painstaking investigation into the structure and subjective status of such gaps, interruptions, delays and intervals as we have briefly outlined in this introduction, and to consider whether a form of ecstatic venturing beyond the ego, or an original (non-receptive) creativity could be at all conceivable. We will endeavour to understand whether the promise of these technologies to attain to a form of immediacy can be fulfilled and if so what consequences this must necessarily entail. For, surely, if a hitherto impassable limit can be broached this cannot be due to some seismic technological event, but because it has been revealed to be something other than that which we originally thought it to be. Likewise, if certain problems prove incapable of being negotiated this will not be due to a flaw, weakness or shortcoming on the side of the technologies themselves, but will be for essential reasons pertaining to the nature of the problem.

[8] Ibid., p. 80.
[9] Ibid., p. 81.

Chapter One: 'The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.' [1]

He understood that the task of moulding the incoherent and dizzying stuff that dreams are made of is the most difficult work a man can undertake.

– Jorge Luis Borges, *The Circular Ruins*[2]

Since the gradual repudiation or rejection of physical skill as a necessary constituent of artistic practice it has been difficult to define with any degree of finality what it is exactly that an artist *does*, and what it is that makes one an artist. Undoubtedly the most persistent answer, prevalent at least since the late 1960s heyday of conceptual art, is that the talent of the artist consists in generating *ideas*. But does this mean that the essence of the creative work takes place in advance of its construction? Does the work of art (or novel, film, or piece of music for that matter) necessarily proceed from a conscious plan or does it only take shape as it is being enacted? Concomitantly, if an artist has a 'good idea' is its implementation a mere formality, or conversely can a 'bad idea', executed well, result in a successful piece of work? Number 33 of Sol Lewitt's *Sentences on Conceptual Art* states flatly: 'It is difficult to bungle a good idea.'[3] For LeWitt, the form is merely a vehicle and the artist must go about constructing it so as to maximise the clarity and impact of this animating principle. When considering, for instance, the dimensions of a work LeWitt writes, 'the piece must be large enough to give the viewer whatever information he needs to understand the work and placed in such a way

[1] Sol LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', first published in *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (1967), reprinted in *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) p. 834.
[2] Jorge Luis Borges, *Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin, 2000) p. 46.
[3] LeWitt, 'Sentences on Conceptual Art', first published in *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (1969), reprinted in *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, p. 839.

that will facilitate this understanding.'[4] The enactment is a wholly pragmatic affair; so long as the ideational content has been transmitted effectively then it has been a success. However, is it possible to deny this radical pragmatism without overemphasising or fetishising the corporeal, sensual or 'performative' aspect of artistic creation? Carl Andre, often associated with conceptual art but vocally critical of its rhetoric, rejects the notion of the idea as sovereign. For Andre, 'all ideas are the same except in execution. They lie in the head. In terms of the artist, the only difference between one idea and another is how it is executed.'[5] And elsewhere he states, 'if abstract art is art as its own content, then conceptual art is pure content without art. Following Reinhardt, I desire art-as-art, not art-as-idea.'[6] This dialectic of idea and expression, referring here for expediency to debates surrounding conceptual art but by no means limited to such a context, will one way or another form the crux of this first chapter.

Too Much, Too Little: Beckett and Joyce, Cage and Boulez

For any artist working to a pre-formulated idea, or a precise conception of what it is he or she intends to do, the process of its physical realisation can often be experienced as a frustrating struggle, fraught with obstacles and impasses. As Kant puts it in his *Anthropology*, '*actuality* is always more limited than the *idea* that serves as a pattern for realisation.'[7] This imposing of limitations on what appears boundless, and the conferral of clunky materiality onto what seems perfect in the

[4] Ibid., p. 836.
[5] Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) p. 40.
[6] Ibid., p. 157.
[7] Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell, revised and updated by Hans H. Rudnick (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996) §30, AA 173. [My italics.]

mind is the reason why the physical art-object can often disappoint its creator and fail to live up the promise of its gestation. It can seem that this leap from psychical event to physical object is an impossible one, where the very first gesture or incision feels like a compromise and a corruption: an irretrievable turning away from the idea. All further work undertaken as the artist attempts to bring it closer to the original conception is a form of regression – a return to an impossible origin – that is simultaneously a *pro*gressive dislocation from the origin, as the more she works it over the further it strays from its starting point. Like a palimpsest, it retains the traces of all that has been added and removed, such that even if the artist undoes what has been done and attempts to start afresh it is at risk of becoming laboured, and referring more and more to *itself* and the previous failures than to the virginal idea as it started out. This, of course, is in many respects how a work of art takes shape and becomes both more and less than that which it started out as. Great things can come from accidents or even from failing to accomplish what was initially intended; but it can also have the opposite effect, and repeated frustration can stymie the creative process.

This tension that is in some respects the condition and predicament of the artist is expressed in tragicomic fashion by the narrator in Samuel Beckett's 1947 novel *Molloy*:

> This is one of the reasons why I avoid speaking as much as possible. For I always say either too much or too little, which is a terrible thing for a man with a passion for truth like mine. And I shall not abandon this subject, to which I shall probably never have occasion to return, with such a storm

> blowing up, without making this curious observation, that it often happened to me, before I gave up speaking for good, to think I had said too little when in fact I had said too much and in fact to have said too little when I thought I had said too much. I mean that on reflection, in the long run rather, my verbal profusion turned out to be penury, and inversely. So time sometimes turns the tables. In other words, or perhaps another thing, whatever I said it was never enough and always too much.[8]

The work of the artist is '*never enough*' in that more could always be done to a piece; perhaps she has not successfully articulated what she wished to express. It is *not quite there*, and the threat of misinterpretation or misconstrual is ever-present. There are innumerable accounts of artists being repeatedly reluctant to declare a work finished and hand it over to be exhibited where it would circulate beyond their control; and as Alberto Giacometti once remarked, 'that's the terrible thing: the more one works on a picture, the more impossible it becomes to finish it.'[9]

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[8] Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnameable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009) pp. 29-30. Interestingly, this paragraph from *Molloy* and the interpretation here given is anticipated in a strikingly similar passage from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

> Speech and work are outer expressions in which the individual no longer keeps and possesses himself within himself, but lets the inner get completely outside of him, leaving it to the mercy of something other than himself. For that reason we can say with equal truth that these expressions express the inner too much, as that they do so too little: too much, because the inner itself breaks out in them and there remains no antithesis between them and it; they give not merely an expression of the inner, but directly the inner itself; too little, because in speech and action the inner turns itself into something else, thus putting itself at the mercy of the element of change, which twists the spoken word and the accomplished act into meaning something else than they are in and for themselves, as actions of this particular individual. (§312. Tr. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 187.)

In the words I speak or the work I produce I estrange myself from myself. The object is not an external sign pointing back to something inner that remains mine, but *is* my inner intention externalised – I do not keep anything back in reserve. But at the same time, since I am powerless to determine its reception, what is intended may become lost or altered in transmission. For Hegel it seems I am thus fully present and wholly absent from my product or utterance.

[9] 'The Painter's Keys', http://quote.robertgenn.com/auth_search.php?authid=1492, [Accessed 02.03.10.]

However, it is simultaneously '*always too much*', in that the very first act – breaking the silence, sullying the clean white canvas or making the first mark on an empty page – is itself an excess; it *commits*, while corrupting the purity of the idea or intention. Every decision after that first breach takes the artist further away from where she started, and following the path along the way she came never leads back to where she began; wiping away traces always makes more traces of its own.[10]

Another way the too much/too little axis can be approached is from the perspective of the viewer. What we are presented with is in itself *not enough*; it is too enigmatic and opaque. We may often find we want to read some explanation or historical detail of what has been done and what it means, a tendency which has culminated in the increasingly widespread availability of explanatory audio guides at major art galleries, conveniently summarising and deciphering these strange objects for our easy digestion. But it is equally *too much* in that it places limits on our imagination and binds it to this particular object we are considering, limiting the possibilities to this particular work and nothing else. In other words, like the horror movie maxim that an unseen menace is always more terrifying than anything that could be directly *shown*, the more we are presented with the less work there is for our imagination. If one finally gets to experience a rare or hard to come by film or piece of music that one has long anticipated it can very often fail to live up to our expectations. So the same thing that elevates our imagination to new heights

[10] Our account of the artist's procedure bears certain similarities to what Levinas has written about *indolence*, as 'the impossibility of beginning': 'To begin is to begin in the inalienable possession of oneself. It is then to be unable to turn back; it is to set sail and cut the moorings. From then on one has to run through the adventure to its end. To interrupt what was really begun is to end it in failure, and not to abolish the beginning. The failure is part of the adventure. What was interrupted does not sink into nothingness like a game. This means that an action is an inscription in being. And indolence, as a recoil before action, is a hesitation before existence, an indolence about existing.' *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001) p. 15.

simultaneously *limits* it, leaving us unsatisfied and impatient to move on to something else that will perhaps satiate us more. So if the artist inhabits the role of Beckett's Molloy, the position of the viewer as I have characterised it could, pushed to its limit, be identified with another character in 20th Century comic literature, the inscrutable master of disguise Henry Burlingame in John Barth's satirical novel *The Sot-Weed Factor*. He loves and loathes the world for this very reason – that while it inspires his imagination and ''twas splendid here and there […] he could not but loathe it for having been *the case*.'[11] That it is *the case* is both the cause and the limit of our enjoyment, grounding it and rendering it commonplace.

The artist caught in the double bind of 'never enough and always too much' can often find herself tempted to, like Molloy, 'give up speaking for good'. She is thwarted by the seeming impossibility of creating a work of art and finds that the only available action is inaction, recalling Foucault's formulation of madness as *l'absence d'oeuvre*;[12] everything is compromised so why do anything. One strategy of coping with this impasse would be to do *almost* nothing, what the composer George Brecht called 'Borderline Art': sights barely seen, sounds barely heard and easily missed. Many of the practices, disruptions and interventions of conceptual art, Fluxus, and the latter period of great American and European abstract painting were so minimal as to be barely there. More recently, it is not uncommon in free improvisatory music for performances to hover just above the threshold of total silence; one strains to discern the body of a guitar squeaking as it is rubbed, or the slight rattling sound of a saxophonist's fingers on the keys. It is as if any breaking of the silence must be fully justified, and the longer it goes on the more loaded and

[11] John Barth, *The Sot-Weed Factor* (London: Atlantic, 2002) p. 415.
[12] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London & New York: Rouledge, 2001) p. 272.

problematic would any sound become. It casts the act of making music as a heroically brave gesture. The 'borderline' on which such gestures operate is, in the words of Foucault, 'the exterior edge, the line of dissolution, the contour against the void';[13] that is, the limit separating the work from the nothingness out of which it emerged. Every work of art is, for Foucault, 'the sheer cliff over the abyss of [its own] absence.'[14] In veering as close as possible to this precipice, minimal gestures dramatise this fact and strive to enact the moment of their own coming into existence – the first tentative crossing of the line.

What these considerations could not fail to call to mind is of course John Cage's famous 'silent' piece *4'33"*, the score for which read simply thus:

I

TACET

II

TACET

III

TACET

The piece is in three movements and, as 'TACET' is the word used in western notation to tell a player to remain silent during a movement, the entire piece is silent. As is well known, the title *4'33"* is the total length in minutes and seconds of its notorious first performance in 1952 by the pianist David Tudor, who marked the beginning and ending of each movement by closing and opening his piano lid

[13] Ibid., p. 273.
[14] Ibid.

respectively; but Cage makes clear that the piece could last any length of time and be 'performed' on any musical instrument or combination of instruments. Thus he imposes a wholly arbitrary and variable time frame during which what takes place is the 'piece' but what occurs immediately before or after this duration is not. As Michael Nyman describes,

> At the first performance Tudor, seated in the normal fashion on a stool in front of the piano, did nothing more nor less than silently close the keyboard lid at the beginning of, and raise it at the end of each time period. The score had not of course explicitly asked him to make these – or any – actions, but they were implied because some means or other had to be devised to observe the three time lengths without causing to be heard any sounds not specified by the composer.[15]

This is a piece of music reduced to the minimal difference between something and nothing; a limit in time that inevitably bleeds and undermines its boundaries. In stripping virtually everything away all that is left is the frame, and that is a wholly arbitrary and unstable one. Whenever a piece of music is performed the 'start' and 'end', what is within and without of the work, is difficult to define but in Cage's piece this forms the very object of the work, some token signal from the performer acting as the only indication that the piece is under way, and even this is inferred rather than specified in the score. The clearly defined duration of the piece both excludes and includes the other side of that limit: time in its infinite expanse. In Derridean terms it *delimits* a definite space while *de-limiting* and contaminating

[15] *Experimental Music; Cage and Beyond*, Second Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 11.

that space in the very act of establishing it.[16] It excludes this boundless excess by drawing up the frame in the first place, delineating *this* period of time and identifying it as the duration of a piece of music. However, as Kant puts it, any 'determinate magnitude of time is possible only through limitations [put] on a single underlying time. Hence, the original presentation, *time*, must be given as unlimited.'[17] So in the very act of enclosing a section of time it *evokes* time itself, a sublime gesture that in Kant's terms *negatively presents* the absolute. The piece is almost nothing, threatening to collapse entirely but as such, as Derrida would have it, it merely draws attention to the instability of *all* limits and all acts of framing.

Beckett once famously said of James Joyce:

> I realised that [he] had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than adding.[18]

In this is an implicit acknowledgement that one can *never* have complete control over one's work and attempting to do so will be an endless, Sisyphean task, for no matter how tightly sealed the frame may appear to be it will always allow for escape and infiltration. So Beckett may be said to approach this knot of too

[16] Cf. Jacques Derrida, 'Parergon', *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian Mcleod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) p. 140.
[17] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996) A32/B48
[18] Quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury 1996) p. 352.

much/too little from the side of too little and Joyce that of the too much. An argument could be made that these competing tendencies constituted the two essential horns of modernism, and that the foundering of the modernist project could be ascribed to each direction reaching its limit – in the one case of there being nothing left to strip away and in the other complete saturation. Perhaps an even more exemplary illustration is the deeply ideological rift between the Experimental Music of Cage, Morton Feldman, Cornelius Cardew, etc., and the classical avant-garde of Schoenberg and Webern through to Boulez, Stockhausen and others. While the former were concerned with processes and chance procedures and treated notation as instructions for actions to be carried out, the results of which varied hugely from performance to performance, the latter attempted to rigidly define and contain what took place in their work. Again, in the words of Michael Nyman,

> [This] is the effect that processes have in experimental music: they are the most direct and straightforward means of simply setting sounds in motion; they are impersonal and external and so they do not have the effect of organising sounds and integrating them, of creating relationships of harmony as the controlling faculty of the human mind does.[19]

And at the other end of the spectrum,

> [One] finds Boulez, seemingly disconcerted by the impermanence of his sounds, constantly trying to fix them with ever greater precision by

[19] Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 29.

> obsessive revising, refining and reworking, in the hope of sculpting his sounds into more permanent finality.[20]

The music of Boulez and the rest of the European avant-garde, in the estimation of Nyman and those he includes under the 'Experimental Music' banner, is rigid and lifeless, demanding a far less autocratic authorial approach. Boulez himself on the other hand would no doubt have considered the work of the Cagean school to be lacking in complexity and compositional rigour and needing more from the guiding hand of the composer.

Whereas traditionally musical notation was seen as an, albeit not ideal, method of transcribing a 'musical thought' in the words of Edgar Varése,[21] the experimental composers, as noted above, all but abandoned conventional notation in favour of ambiguous worded instructions and pictographic diagrams that could be interpreted any number of ways. This transformation of the score from a graphic *representation* of an arrangement of sounds into a set of *instructions* retroactively allows us to, as Nyman again notes, see 'the note C in a Mozart piano sonata [to mean] "hit that piece of ivory there, with that force and for that long."'[22] This echoes Willem de Kooning's famous declaration, 'the past does not influence me, I influence the past',[23] and similar sentiments expressed by Borges and Cage himself.[24] For the European avant-garde however, unconvinced by such radical

[20] Ibid., p. 9.
[21] Ibid., p. 4.
[22] Ibid., p. 22 n.
[23] Ibid.
[24] 'The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.' J.L. Borges, 'Kafka and his Precursors', *Other Inquisitions 1937-52*, trans. Ruth L.C. Simms (London: Souvenir Press, 1964) p. 108. 'I rather think that the past doesn't go A B C, that is to say from Ives to someone younger than Ives to people still younger, but rather that we live in a field situation in which by our actions, by what we do, we are able to see

moves, the conventional system of notation was still something to be struggled with, as an inadequate but nonetheless essential vehicle for transcribing one's 'musical thoughts'. This inadequacy became ever more pronounced when greater emphasis began to be placed on timbre than on pitch, and 'non-musical' elements began to be incorporated such as electronic devices and tape collages.

Stockhausen, who himself experimented with novel forms of notation, but perhaps for rather different reasons than those of the Anglo-American composers, once said,

> My intuition, my fantasy, is so much more developed than what I can do. I am constantly hitting my head against a wall because everything is so slow. I have so many ideas, and really brilliant ones, that I can never realise […] I will try to get a mission to a place which is more advanced, where music is far more developed. A place where I can work directly with the vibrations, where the atmosphere is adapted to the kind of vibrations that exist, where the people are so sensitive that I can make music right out of my consciousness, and where the translation is not so primitive. I have to go beyond writing, and using erasers that don't work, bad paper and all this. You see, it's all very primitive here.[25]

While Stockhausen has a well-deserved reputation for eccentricity and mysticism and comments like these should be taken in such a context, it nevertheless gives

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what other people do in a different light than we do without our having done anything. What I mean to say is that the music we are writing now influences the way in which we hear and appreciate the music of Ives more than that the music of Ives influences us to do what we do.' John Cage, quoted in Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 31.

[25] Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Towards a Cosmic Music*, texts selected and translated by Tim Nevill (Shaftesbury: Element, 1989) pp. 16-17.

voice to a common frustration. Indeed this notion of creating work directly 'out of one's consciousness' must be a familiar dream of the composer or artist. Raymond Scott, the composer and electronic music pioneer, expressed similar sentiments when he said in 1949,

> Perhaps within the next hundred years, science will perfect a process of thought transference from composer to listener. The composer will sit alone on the concert stage and merely *think* his idealised conception of his music. Instead of recordings of actual music sound, recordings will carry the brainwaves of the composer directly to the mind of the listener.'[26]

This, in effect, is a yearning for the artistic idea to appear fully formed as an object, bypassing the crude practicalities and limitations involved in the process of its assembly and eliminating all obstacles between conception and execution.

The earliest notable example of music created straight out of the brainwaves of the performer is Alvin Lucier's 1965 piece *Music for Solo Performer*. Electrodes are attached to the performer's scalp and the vibrations from the amplified alpha rhythms are used to resonate a number of percussion instruments. But while this could be said to be music created by thought, it is evidently not music that has been *thought into being*. It could just as easily be the performer's heartbeat triggering the sounds, although this obviously would have been less compelling. The actual *contents* of that cognitive activity are strictly irrelevant and, in any case, inaccessible. The wish being expressed by the composers above is rather different;

[26] http://raymondscott.com/Liner1.html. [Accessed 05.01.10]

namely, they desire for their actual subjective states to be harnessed and for the music 'in their head' to be brought into reality. As fanciful as this sounds, extraordinary technological advances in the brain sciences are fast making it a very real and urgent concern.

Scientists have over the last few decades developed very reliable means of measuring and harnessing human brain activity and utilising this information in ever more refined and efficient technologies. A Brain-Computer Interface (BCI) involves the transmitting of neural impulses directly to a computer, enabling the user to bypass physical actions and manipulate mechanical tools or computer systems using only their brainwaves. It allows for the control of a device by explicitly *thinking* of the task in question, for example controlling a prosthetic limb by merely thinking about the intended movement.[27] There has been remarkable, well publicised research conducted on monkeys, who learned to feed themselves using a robotic arm controlled by the brain, managing to manoeuvre the arm effortlessly as if it were a part of their own body.[28] Early steps are also being taken toward developing an interface that will enable a form of 'brain-to-brain communication', but we will address this particular prospect in a later chapter.

The most common type of BCI system uses EEG (electroencephalogram) signals from electrodes attached to the user's scalp, but this is limited in scope and in accuracy, mainly due to the distance between the surface of the scalp and the brain

[27] A systematised, functional model of a BCI system, clearly and effectively describing how such technology operates, is provided by S.G. Mason and G.E. Birch in 'A General Framework for Brain-Computer Interface Design', *IEEE Transactions on Neural Systems and Rehabilitation Engineering* 11, no. 1 (March 2003): pp. 70-85.
[28] M. Velliste et al, 'Cortical control of a prosthetic arm for self-feeding', *Nature* 453 (2008): pp. 1098-1101.

itself, which results in weak signals. The only way to counter this limitation is through invasive or partially invasive procedures which either insert electrodes directly into the brain tissue or on the inside of the skull but outside of the membrane protecting the brain. Daniel Moran, a significant pioneer of the latter procedure (called epidural electrocorticography or EECoG) predicts, with casual brevity, that as the technology is perfected, 'we'll drill a small hole in the skull, pop the bone out, drop the device in, replace the bone, sew up the scalp and you'll have what amounts to Bluetooth in your head that translates your thoughts into actions.'[29]

What is of especial interest for the moment is the work being done by researchers at a number of academic institutions in adapting this technology for musical composition and performance, the aim being to enable the subject to 'think' or, perhaps better, 'intend', a note that is recognised by a computer and executed.[30] Its primary stated purpose, as with most BCI technology, is to enable those with disabilities to accomplish tasks which they are unable to carry out physically, but the implications extend far beyond this. So if one were to conceive of a piece of

[29] D. Lutz, 'Epidural electrocorticography may finally allow enduring control of a prosthetic or paralyzed arm by thought alone', Washington University in St. Louis, http://news.wustl.edu/news/Pages/21876.aspx. [Accessed 11.04.11]

[30] Two such examples are outlined in M. Grierson, 'Composing with Brainwaves: Minimal Trial P300 Recognition as an Indication of Subjective Preference for the Control of a Musical Instrument', *Proceedings of the ICMC, Belfast*, 2008. (Source: Goldsmiths College Department for Computing website, http://doc.gold.ac.uk/~mus02mg/wp-content/uploads/m_s_grierson_revised_icmc_2008.pdf [Accessed 20.09.09]) and E.R. Miranda, 'Brain-Computer Music Interface for Composition and Performance', *International Journal on Disability and Human Development* 5, no. 2 (2006): pp. 119-125. The former details the results and methods of successful trials using EEG to control a synthesiser or sequencer, in which the user makes a decision to focus on a particular note from a choice offered on a monitor that is then identified and executed by the computer software. The system described in the latter differs in both its aims and its technological procedures: rather than deciphering and producing a particular note that the subject intends, this system uses artificial intelligence to interpret the EEG patterns based on a store of musical pre-sets. In this case the resulting piece is not a reproduction of a melody that the performer has envisaged but a generative piece of music triggered by brainwaves where the computer makes the compositional decisions.

music but were hampered by a lack of musical ability this need not necessarily be an obstacle; one need only *think* of the piece and potentially there may be the capability to take the information directly from one's brain and bring it into reality. But this of course would remove the aspect of physical expression from music-making, of the struggle with the instrument and the need to translate one's ideas into a manifest form. The question of what implications such a development would carry for artistic creation in general will be of paramount importance for us here.

It should be stressed that the term 'physical expression' is being employed rather loosely and not in a romantic or ideological sense, such as the musician or gestural painter supposedly giving of his or her body and soul in the work. There obviously exist countless forms of artistic expression that do not carry this association. Computer music, for instance, has often been described by hostile critics as cold and mechanical and the artists themselves accused of doing nothing other than clicking mouse buttons. However, as with most mechanical arts, while the level of strictly physical activity may be minimal this absence of physicality in no way equates to an absence of authorial involvement or compositional expression. Furthermore, in visual art post-Warhol it is a commonplace for works to show no sign of the artist's hand and in many cases for the actual physical construction to have been carried out by assistants. So, for 'expression' we might just as easily have substituted 'execution', for it is being used to refer to the actions undertaken, *whatever they may be*, to bring about the physical work itself and to realise what one intends to do. Certain technical and practical considerations need to be negotiated and the resultant object will surely always differ in some essential respect from the 'idea', however fully realised or provisional this latter may be.

What we are concerned to address here is this minimal gap between the idea or intention of the artist and the outcome, and whether the prospect of thinking an art object into being will destroy or bridge that gap, facilitating a more 'direct' realisation of an idea, and with what potential consequences.

Perhaps even more startling than the BCI technologies just outlined is the extensive research into brain analysis using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) combined with computational models, whose aim is to digitally reconstruct live, dynamic visual experiences from the brain. In an ongoing series of trials at the University of California, Berkeley,[31] neurologists have developed a procedure which involves scanning the brains of test subjects as they watched video clips, while computer software searches for correlations between the configuration of shapes, colours and movements in the films, and patterns of activity in the subjects' visual cortex. Subsequently the computer was fed 18 million seconds of random video clips and programmed to predict which areas of the brain these clips would stimulate in subjects who were watching them. In the final stage the software was used to monitor the subjects' brains as they watched a *new* set of films and, using the database of video clips as building blocks, the system was able to reconstruct the 'contents' of their cognitive activity and display on screen highly distorted, low resolution, but continuous footage of what they were seeing. So the information was taken only from the neural activity, without reference to the video footage they were watching, and the results coincided remarkably closely with the visual stimulus. Scientists are talking up the possibility in the future of this technology advancing to a stage where even abstract thoughts and intentions can be deciphered

[31] S. Nishimoto et al, 'Reconstructing Visual Experiences from Brain Activity Evoked by Natural Movies', *Current Biology* 21, no. 19 (11.10.11): pp. 1641-1646.

(a subsequent chapter will address similar neuroimaging trials which have been able to distinguish subjects' memories, and the possibility of recording electronic visualisations of dreams.) Without wishing to resort to the hyperbole inevitably contained in press reports of such research, we are effectively facing the prospect of a technology that can 'read' a subject's thoughts or memories and produce a digital rendering of something like a 'mental picture'. The ethical and political concerns thrown up here are obvious, and much sport could be had predicting the uses advertisers could make of such a facility in some bleak dystopian future where capitalism has gained access to our intimate thoughts, or prophesying Philip K. Dick-esque state-sponsored neuro-monitoring. However, what concerns us for the moment is the possible creative utilisation of these systems and whether this could radically transform artistic activity. For if we were to coordinate such cognitive imaging technologies with rapidly improving three-dimensional printing techniques, which can 'print' solid objects from digital files, there is the very real possibility that an imagined object could be immediately physically materialised.

Jack Gallant, one of the neurologists at Berkeley, said in a press release,

> [At] the moment, when you see something and want to describe it to someone you have to use words or draw it and it doesn't work very well. You could use this technology to transmit the image to someone. It might be useful for artists or to allow you to recover an eyewitness's memory of a crime.[32]

[32] Chris Gourlay, 'Psychic Computer Shows Your Thoughts on Screen', *The Sunday Times*, 01.11.09, p. 5.

Evidently he regards this procedure as simply a more efficient means of externalising one's thoughts; that drawing or 'using words' are clumsy and inadequate for such purposes and are destined to be superseded. This explicitly addresses what we have outlined regarding the difficulty in translating an idea into reality, but it will be important to consider to what extent this is a *necessary* difficulty. A work of art is not simply an outward manifestation of a prior concept, so again this question of what takes place *in between* – the gap between thought and actuality, and that between what the artist *intends* to do and what he or she actually *does* – arises, and whether this is at least as crucial and fundamental to the work as the idea itself.

Excursus: Three Stories by Borges

It may prove fruitful at this stage to take a slight digression through some of the early stories of Jorge Luis Borges in order to provide a helpful illustration of what is at stake here, and in the process move our discussion onto a more profound space of questioning.

This theme of creating a new element of reality through mere thought alone that can coexist and interact with already existing reality recurs again and again in Borges. In *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, the narrator describes an imaginary world named Tlön, revealed to him through elliptical and fragmentary encyclopaedic references, that exists according to the laws of Berkeleyan Idealism. In Tlön, objects have no material existence, they merely coincide with the way they are seen. One of the most extraordinary phenomena in this world is the appearance of duplicated lost

objects, *hrönir*, which are multiple versions of the same thing found by different people independently. Thus objects can be created or conjured into reality *through the very act of looking for them*. The occurrence of these outlandish phenomena resonates with common experience when, as occasionally happens, one has been searching for something in particular for such a long time that upon its eventual discovery one experiences a strange mix of déjà vu and hallucination. One has pictured it in one's mind for so long that its actual physical presence feels both totally familiar and strangely foreign at the same time, like a kind of uncanny phantasm that one has produced oneself.

And then, '[s]ometimes stranger and purer than any *hrön* is the *ur* – the thing produced by suggestion, the object brought forth by hope.'[33] These *ur* are not mere replicas of previously perceived objects but entirely new entities that appear as objects in the world every bit as real (or unreal) as any other thing. The products of these interfaces could rather illuminatingly be likened to *hrönir*, or *ur*, objects that appear through the will of the user, whether it is a reduplicated clone of something one is trying to recall or a wholly new object conjured into being. In a 'Postscript' to the main body of the story the narrator describes how the world of Tlön began to intrude upon the 'real' world, with foreign objects from this fictitious place appearing in reality. It is told how people rushed to embrace the logic of Tlön because it tells of an ontology that places our human perception as the ground of reality and not some divine law to which we do not have access. Reality thus '"caved in" at more than one point'[34] and the logic and history of Tlön took over, making this fictional world itself an *ur* – an imaginary creation that obtained

[33] Borges, *Fictions*, p. 20.
[34] Ibid., p. 24.

substantial existence outside of the minds of its creators. Our following chapter will explore the implications this capacity of spontaneous thought-creation will carry regarding the distinction between human and divine cognition. Perhaps the appearance of these objects will likewise lead to the world of science fiction encroaching upon *our* reality.

In *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,* Borges provides another model of an act of spontaneous creation through thought and determination. Pierre Menard is a fictional French author, described in a mock-biographical portrait, whose life's work was the seemingly impossible task of writing a word for word reconstruction of *Don Quixote*, from scratch and without reference to Cervantes' original. However, Menard did not 'merely' undertake to *channel* Cervantes and write a copy of the same work, rather he was to write it '*through the experiences of Pierre Menard'*.[35] In other words, he was to make the work his own but without changing a word, thus as D.L. Shaw insightfully points out, 'Menard's *Don Quixote* is in fact a kind of *hrön*.'[36] From the fragments that he achieved, the writer of the memoir is moved to declare that Menard's version, though strictly identical, is in fact a more subtle, greater work than the original, because of the richer historical tradition that Menard has inherited in the three centuries since the book's first publication; the same words written by a 17th Century Spaniard and a 20th Century Frenchman cannot possibly have the same meaning or resonance. At one stage the writer compares the 'same' section written by both authors but regards them as two radically different passages:

[35] Ibid., p. 38.
[36] Donald L. Shaw, *Borges Ficciones: Critical Guides to Spanish Texts* (London: Grant and Cutler in association with Tamesis Books, 1976) p. 24.

> *…truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and advisor to the present, and the future's counsellor*.
>
> This catalogue of attributes, written in the seventeenth century, and written by the 'ingenious layman' Miguel de Cervantes, is mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other hand, writes:
>
> *…truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and advisor to the present, and the future's counsellor*.
>
> History, the *mother* of truth! – the idea is staggering. Menard, a contemporary of William James, defines history not as a *delving into* reality but as the very *fount* of reality. Historical truth, for Menard is not 'what happened'; it is what we *believe* happened.[37]

Though the work remained incomplete, the narrator describes reading Cervantes' *Quixote* 'as if' it were Menard's. He then imagines attributing other canonical works to different authors and thus realising these new works and transforming the old ones. If one were to read Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* 'as if' it were written by a contemporary author, such as Thomas Pynchon, it is to actually *create* this hybrid, bastard novel. But such radical re-imaginings are of course not necessary, for every reading creates a work anew to some extent. Just as writing *Don Quixote* now, in the early 21st Century, would be to write something entirely different to the book

[37] Borges, *Fictions*, p. 41.

Cervantes wrote, so to *read* it now is to read a completely different work to that read by its original readers.

This act of transubstantiation is outwardly similar to such conceptual strategies as Michael Craig-Martin's *An Oak Tree* from 1973. It consists, famously, of a glass of water on a shelf attached to the gallery wall 9ft from the floor, accompanied by this (rather self-satisfied) text:

> Q: To begin with could you describe this work?
>
> A: Yes, of course. What I've done is change a glass of water into a full-grown oak tree without altering the accidents of the glass of water.
>
> Q: The accidents?
>
> A: Yes. The colour, feel, weight, size.
>
> Q: Haven't you simply called this glass of water an oak tree?
>
> A: Absolutely not. It is not a glass of water anymore. I have changed its actual substance. It would no longer be accurate to call it a glass of water. One could call it anything one wished but that would not alter the fact that it is an oak tree. […][38]

And so on. Or obviously there are Duchamp's earlier gestures, transforming quotidian items into art objects through the caprice of the artist. Such acts, as is now a commonplace, enabled us to see an art object no longer as something that must have been physically created by the artist's hand, but rather as something brought about through thought and will. Is there really such a radical disparity

[38] Cited in Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998) p. 248.

between an art practice that directly brings into being an object of thought from one which alters the properties of an already existing object simply by investing it with an 'idea'?

To return to Borges, the most apposite of his works for this discussion is surely *The Circular Ruins,* from the same early collection of stories as those already discussed. In it, an enigmatic stranger arrives by boat in a village somewhere in 'the East'. It transpires that the man is a magician who has set himself the task of dreaming a man into existence; that is, of conjuring up a son through a concentrated act of thought and then imposing him on reality. We are told of the various stages his dreams go through, at first chaotic, then dialectical, 'he was seeking a soul worthy of taking its place in the universe.'[39] He imagines a lecture theatre filled with countless faces waiting to learn from him; the ones with promise are those who answer back and venture a reasonable objection to his teachings. After progressing so far with this approach the sorcerer loses his grasp on his creation, realising that he must abandon it and start from scratch with a new procedure. He now begins with a single heart and sets it beating. Then, slowly and painstakingly, he worked outwards until he had the complete man. The God of Fire now appears to him in his dream and says that he will grant his creation life. After this the wizard imparts all his wisdom to his creation, and gives him simple tasks to accomplish in order to accustom him to reality. Finally, when he is deemed ready the father sends his son on his way but clears his memory of his origins and his years of education. Some time later the magician is told by local villagers of a man in another circular enclosure a few miles away who has found fame because he can walk on fire

[39] Borges, *Fictions*, p. 46.

without being burned, and the magician immediately understands that this man is his son. Since the God of fire gave him life and knows of his unnatural birth the flames cannot harm him, thus betraying the fact that he is not a real human being but a facsimile. The story ends with the wizard's awful realisation that he too is a facsimile, dreamed up in precisely the same way, the possibility of which has been haunting him throughout the story.

Borges' stories are often tempting to interpret as allegories, a temptation that should of course not lead us into attempting to find a definitive 'explanation'. However, for the purposes at hand we could see the wizard as the counterpart of the writer or artist, and his impossible task of composing a new element of reality as that of artistic creation, where the artist generates through an act of thought something that bears his patronage but which is independent of and will outlive him – something for which he is ultimately responsible but which nevertheless extends far beyond him and his intentions. At various points in the story we find support for this reading; for example, the only students in the vast lecture hall who are deserving of their teacher's time are those who in some regard venture an objection to him. Thus there is little use in giving body to an idea which is already fully realised, it must in some sense confront its creator and surprise him or her.

When this way of working predictably fails to bear fruit the wizard tries an entirely different, excruciatingly methodical approach. Again in the helpful words of D.L. Shaw: 'inverting his procedure, the wizard abandons the general, the external and the abstract. He turns to the internal and the concrete: the heart of the individual.'[40]

[40] D.L. Shaw, *Borges Ficciones*, p. 28.

We may not want to be so bluntly literal as to call this beating heart the 'idea' from which all else derives but it is firmer footing upon which to proceed. The magician's reluctance to let his son go when he is ready, impatient even, to be born echoes the reticence described above of artists unwilling to declare a work finished; and the stage when he finally relinquishes him, erasing from his memory the details of how he came to exist, is the point at which the artist releases her work and sends it on its 'essential drifting' in the words of Derrida.[41] The progeny must be autonomous and stand apart from his creator's hand and make his own way in the world.

The fact that the magician is in a sense removed from reality, enclosed within the circular ruins of the title, is a further parallel with the writer or artist, who according to cliché shuts herself away to carry out her work. The local peasant folk who bring food and water to the man and who eventually inform him of his son's fate are 'part' of reality in a way that the magician is not, who must take up a certain distance from it in order to perform his task. It could be said that the artist/writer 'observes' life from a vantage point somewhat outside of it, indeed the late American writer David Foster Wallace described novelists as voyeurs, desperately studying how 'real' human beings act and talk.[42] The object he introduces into reality from this outside place thus doesn't quite 'fit'; his son is not a human being like other human beings just as the work of art is not simply a thing among other things – it sticks out and refuses to cohere. What is more, in the case of this manner of creation that we are considering, thought manifested immediately into being, it

[41] Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) p. 316.
[42] Cf. David Foster Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and US Fiction', in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (London: Abacus, 1998.)

could be said that the result will always be a hollow simulacrum. Where the truth about the wizard's son is betrayed by his immunity to fire, in the case of the art object that stems from mere thought (whatever form this may take) perhaps its secret would be revealed by its seeming empty and false and encouraging nothing but indifference; for since nothing has been won or lost in its execution nothing has really been accomplished. Furthermore, more gravely, if these objects conjured into existence could successfully take their place in the world of things would it render the reality of all things uncertain, like at the story's ending when the wizard comes to doubt his own existence? This sounds rather grandiloquent, but essentially would the very presence of these thought-objects in the real world, along with the capacity to intervene directly into reality via the mind, pose profound ontological questions? Again, this will be returned to in the following chapter.

Knowing and Doing: Kant and the Creative Act

So what about the outcome of such a creative procedure, the art created merely through thinking about it? We have two rather different cases before us that must be distinguished. In the first instance, the BCI, we have a form of telekinetic 'mind control', whereby rather than physically executing a particular task we accomplish it through thought. This has the consequence of obscuring the distinction between what one *can* do, and what one merely *wants* to do but lacks the ability or expertise to carry it out. Again, to return to the example of BCI-generated music, a user without any instrumental ability could compose and perform music simply by thinking about what she *wants* to do. Of course it has always been the case that a composer could write a piece for others to perform that she need not be able to

physically perform herself, but she will need a firm training in classical composition in order to internally hear how the marks on paper will sound when performed. The possibility raised by the BCI however, is for someone without *any* conventional training being granted the ability to compose music, and further on we will need to ask whether without *some* degree of competence, whether compositional or instrumental, one could have the necessary articulation to conceive of a piece at all. Could any amount of attentive listening stand in for this or does it only come through actual *doing*? Essentially the fundamental question is this: is the mode of expression something that could be learned subsequently in order to transcribe an idea that otherwise would find no outlet, or is it a necessary constituent of those ideas? Can one truly have anything to say before knowing *how* to say it?

In the second case however, with the cognitive imaging techniques, things are somewhat more radical, for the very contents of the thought itself, whatever they may be, are made manifest: a 'mental picture' can be harnessed and displayed electronically (and subsequently printed as an object.) The experiments cited above were designed to reproduce specific visual stimuli, thus one can at this stage only speculate about the possibility of a purely fantasied image being so exported, but this possibility itself is enough to open the field of inquiry. We spoke a great deal at the beginning about the difficulties the artist encounters in making the physical object equal to the thought behind it, the idea that she is striving to express. Would these procedures finally accomplish this ideal and nullify the gap?

However, so far we have been working rather loosely and naïvely with a characterisation of the artistic process as the physical realisation of a prior, self-sufficient 'idea'. This has served a purpose but it only holds so far and is ultimately unsatisfactory as an account of artistic creation. Turning now to Kant's third *Critique* may provide assistance in our attempts to develop a more nuanced description of what takes place in the creative act.

Firstly, in the section 'Art in general' (§43), works of art are distinguished from nature 'as making (*facere*) is from acting or *operating* in general (*agere*), and the product or the result of the former is distinguished from that of the latter as *work* (*opus*) from effect (*effectus*).'[43] The act of *making*, or *doing*, implies a decisiveness and deliberateness that is not found in the processes of nature. Furthermore, 'we recognise an art in everything formed in such a way that its actuality must have been preceded by a representation of the thing in its cause […] although the effect could not have been *thought* by the cause.'[44] Put simply, the work of art must be the result of an intentional consciousness that has decided upon its action in advance. Prior to the object's existence or actuality there was the will to act, it did not happen by serendipity or blind instinct. But with the second clause to the statement, that 'the effect could not have been *thought* by the cause', Kant seems to be asserting that the outcome of the artistic process cannot have been predetermined: if the resulting product were already fully worked out in advance and simply awaited its expression as a physical form then we would not be dealing with a work of art but rather some other intentional act.

[43] Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (Hereafter: *CoJ*) trans. James Creed Meredith, revised by Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007) §43, AA 303.
[44] Ibid.

This is confirmed with the second point of Kant's definition:

> *Art*, as human skill, is distinguished also from *science* (as *ability* from *knowledge*), as a practical from a theoretical faculty […] For this reason, also, what one *can* do the moment one only *knows* what is to be done, hence without anything more than sufficient knowledge of the desired result, is not called art. To art that alone belongs for which the possession of the most complete knowledge does not involve one's having then and there the skill to do it. Camper describes very exactly how the best shoe must be made, but he, doubtless, was not able to turn one out himself.[45]

So it is only in the *doing* that a work of art comes to be. A critic or philosopher may claim to know what constitutes a great work of art, but only the artist can carry it out. However, with the cognitive technologies under discussion the distinction between knowing and doing collapses – to know it *is* to do it. Following what was said earlier about the technology in question being merely a more efficient means of externalising one's thoughts, we can see now that this is not simply a convenient shortcut that otherwise leaves the concept of art untouched, it cuts to the very notion of creativity itself. Following Kant's definition of artists being those who are able to carry out that which others may only be able to describe, do these systems negate or counteract the specificity of art and to a greater or lesser extent pave the way for anyone to be an artist? But the crucial aspect here may turn out to be the status of this 'greater or lesser extent.'

[45] AA 303-304. 'Camper' refers to Petrus (or Peter) Camper. From the *Wikipedia* page: 'Petrus Camper (1722-1789) was a Dutch physician, anatomist, physiologist, midwife, zoologist, anthropologist, paleontologist and a naturalist' as well as 'a sculptor, a patron of art and a conservative politician.' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrus_Camper

And let us not forget that the latter point we have dwelled on has been taken in isolation, its original purpose being only to differentiate art, as something that carries with it a practical skill, from science, which carries no such requirement. Furthermore, this is in relation to 'art in general', of which *fine art* is a species, evidenced by the example given being Camper's lack of shoemaking ability rather than someone who lacks artistic genius. For otherwise there would be a contradiction between this notion of the non-artist 'knowing what is to be done' but simply lacking the technical know-how to realise it and the earlier assertion that a representation of the result cannot precede the actuality of the object. The very idea of knowing fully and comprehensively what is to be done before carrying it out is surely anathema to artistic creation, to the experimentation and improvisation that takes place in the creative act. Indeed the Kantian genius works blindly to a large degree, and so even she would be at a loss to recount the procedure or the steps by which a work of art is created. If she *were* to know in advance and thus be able to provide such an account it would imply that she worked to a rule or template. This has a bearing on the discussion above regarding the struggle involved in realising a work of art. Kant here describes it as the 'slow and even painful process of improvement, directed to making the form adequate to his thought without prejudice to the freedom in the play of those powers.'[46] Earlier it was portrayed as the difficulty in bringing the physical form to live up to the idea, while here it is a two-way tussle, or more precisely, a delicate balance, between the imagination and the understanding. What we have been calling quite loosely the 'idea', is here equivalent to what Kant refers to at certain times as imagination and at others as

[46] §48, AA 312-313.

genius. As Henry Allison notes, Kant's definition of genius is somewhat inconsistent – sometimes identified as virtually synonymous with imagination (what Allison calls the 'thin' conception of genius) and at others as including the understanding and judgement along with the productive imagination (the 'thick' conception.)[47] But it could also perhaps be termed inspiration, the imaginative driving force behind a work, and that which the artist attempts to convey.

So not only must the object do justice to the idea, the idea must allow itself to be regulated by taste without sacrificing the play of its powers. The idea is not the unimpeachable sovereign, which everything else must try to satisfy and avoid doing violence to; it too must compromise otherwise the artist is at risk of producing 'nothing but nonsense'.[48] Indeed, if there is a conflict between the two faculties and something must be sacrificed, 'then it should rather be on the side of genius; and judgement, which in matters of fine art bases its decision on its own proper principles, will more readily endure an infringement of the freedom and wealth of the imagination than that the understanding should be compromised.'[49] Working in harmony with the understanding, the imagination is brought back down to earth but it can convey the fruits of its wanderings via what Kant calls aesthetic ideas. These are a counterpart to rational ideas, as something that cannot be encountered in the world:

> Such representations of the imagination may be termed *ideas*. This is partly because they at least strain after something lying out beyond the confines of experience, and so seek to approximate to a presentation of rational

[47] Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 301.
[48] *CoJ*, §50, AA 319.
[49] Ibid., §50, AA 320.

> concepts (i.e. intellectual ideas), thus giving to these concepts the semblance of objective reality. But, on the other hand, there is this most important reason, that no concept can be wholly adequate to them as internal intuitions. The poet essays the task of giving sensible form to the rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, hell, eternity, creation, and so forth. Or, again, as to things of which examples occur in experience, e.g. death, envy and all vices, as also love, fame and the like, transgressing the limits of experience he attempts with the aid of an imagination, which in reaching for a maximum emulates the precedent of reason, to present them for the senses with a completeness of which nature affords no parallel.[50]

An aesthetic idea, then, is a presentation of the imagination which provokes much thought and speculation on the part of the viewer but for which no concept can be found to express it. Just as the idea of reason is a *concept* which cannot be presented by any form or intuition, the aesthetic idea is a *form* to which no concept can measure up:

> [Thus] genius properly consists in the happy relation [between the faculties], which science cannot teach nor diligence learn, enabling one to seek out ideas for a given concept, and, besides, to hit upon the *expression* for them – the expression by means of which the subjective condition of the mind aroused by the ideas as the concomitant of a concept may be communicated to others.[51]

[50] Ibid., §49, AA 314.
[51] Ibid., AA 317.

So the talent of the artist consists jointly in discovering these ideas *and* in presenting them so that others can experience them. An aesthetic idea is not a mental event that must then somehow be presented or transcribed in a physical form, it *is* the form itself. Through presenting these aesthetic ideas the artist incites the same feeling in the viewer of the work, so there is a correlation between the free harmony of the faculties required for the creation of fine art and that which is required for its proper reception. That it can be communicated at all demonstrates a certain shared or common sensibility. Often we find that a great work of art gives voice to something within us that we already felt but only vaguely, while with other works it presents something that we had never thought or felt before but which still strikes a chord and causes us to see things slightly differently as a result.

It is precisely this point – the emphasis on the subjective harmony of cognitive faculties – that forms Hegel's principle quarrel with Kant's aesthetics. For while he identified the beautiful as the point of harmonious union between universal and particular, the idea presented within the sensible on equal terms, this correspondence was located by Kant solely on the side of the judging subject. Hegel remains close to Kantian aesthetic ideas but takes the critical step further in characterising this union between idea and form as true and actual in itself and not as merely subjective.

The task of art for Hegel is to reconcile the idea, which is outside of the finite dimension, with the sensuous material which is to present it and he identifies three stages through which this is accomplished. The first is the requirement that the

content should be suitable and 'qualified for such representation'.[52] Not everything is appropriate for artistic representation and that which is not would lead to a disjuncture between content and form. (This could be likened to Kant's stipulation about that which elicits disgust being the one form of ugliness that cannot be presented in art, for here representation breaks down and our repulsion at the object presented overpowers its artistic rendering.) The second point is that this content should not be merely abstract, vague or general but must be concrete, although not in the way that a material object is concrete. A favourite illustration of this for Hegel is the contrast between the God of Judaism and Islam, which is a 'dead abstraction', and the Christian God, which is individualised in Christ and the Holy Spirit and therefore capable of presentation. This accounts for the greater sophistication of Christian iconography, because '[here] we have essentiality or universality, and particularisation, together with their reconciled unity, and only such unity is the concrete.'[53] This movement from abstract to concrete echoes the methodological shift that the wizard finds he must make in *The Circular Ruins*. The overwhelming abstraction of the first approach leads to failure because it cannot advance to 'particularisation and phenomenal manifestation and to unity with itself in these.'[54] Only when the man is particularised and determined from within can he make the leap into reality. The final point Hegel specifies relates to the matter of the presentation, which must also be concrete, and so because this applies to both the material and the content it is this shared concreteness around which both sides coincide and correspond. Hence because of this essential correspondence the shape that is given to the content is not simply arbitrary or haphazard: 'art does not seize

[52] G.F.W. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Volume 1*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) p. 70.
[53] Ibid., pp. 70-1.
[54] Ibid., p. 71.

upon this form either because it just finds it there or because there is no other; on the contrary, the concrete content itself involves the factor of external, actual, and indeed sensuous manifestation.'[55]

So the form is not external or secondary to the concrete idea, rather the latter involves in itself its sensuous presentation. This then is the fundamental point of difference between Hegel and Kant, because while for Kant the idea remains untouched by presentation and is merely evoked for the subject, for Hegel the idea must actually come forth to be presented and 'carries within itself the principle of its mode of its appearance'.[56] A purely general idea, abstract and undetermined could never be presented or even merely suggested, so 'determinacy is, as it were, the bridge to appearance.'[57]

This notion of a vague or general idea is similarly denied by Deleuze, for whom,

> [An] idea – like the one who has the idea – is already dedicated to a particular field […] Ideas have to be treated like potentials already engaged in one mode of expression or another and inseparable from the mode of expression, such that I cannot say that I have an idea in general.[58]

To be sure, this is no longer the rational idea of which Kant and Hegel treat, but like the Hegelian concrete content it already contains its means of expression. Indeed it would be absurd to imagine an artist developing an idea and then needing

[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., p. 75.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Gilles Deleuze, 'What is the Creative Act?', in *Two Regimes of Madness*, trans. A. Hodge and M. Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006) p. 312.

to decide whether to express this idea as an installation or a painting or a sound piece.

Art, for Deleuze, has nothing at all to do with communication, if by this we understand the transmission of information, for 'a work of art does not contain the least bit of information.'[59] The idea then, in this case, is not something that is communicated through the work as if it were a message; rather it concerns the specific aesthetic of the discipline to which it applies, whether cinema, theatre, visual art, etc. Thus an idea is an exceptional event, occurring only rarely and then developed in and through all of that artist's work and is not something that is conceived and exhausted in every new piece. On this view, the 'idea' of a filmmaker such as Bresson would be what makes all of his films uniquely 'Bressonian', and *not* the particular premise, pitch or storyline of each individual film. So conceptual artists who speak of the 'idea' behind each of their works are not using the term in the Deleuzian sense, which would concern the very approach to art that they adopt and how their body of work re-conceives and enriches art as such. It may not even be his or her own idea, for an idea that is truly potent transcends its originator, such as Duchamp's readymades. Indeed the richness of an idea can be attested to by the amount of proponents it has. From this point of view, the often-heralded 'end of art' could be identified as the end of ideas in this Deleuzian sense, all artists of today working within already established regimes.

[59] Ibid., p. 327.

Intuition and Expression: Croce's Aesthetics

This relation between idea and expression has now become the crucial factor in the discussion. It all turns around whether the execution is to be considered simply as an expedient, something that must be overcome, or whether the idea is already involved in expression and external manifestation from the outset. An interesting and productive approach to this question will be to appeal to the idealist aesthetics of Benedetto Croce and his notion of art as intuition. For Croce, intuition is not the passive, receptive faculty that is described in Kant's philosophy, of which we will have more to say in the following chapter. Rather, Croce portrays it as an active faculty through which we give form to the world, imposing order upon the brute stimuli that affect us, so that we are no longer subject to the sensations that act upon us but are their master. This is a type of *knowledge*, independent of and prior to intellectual knowledge that is based upon our power to form mental representations. Intellectual knowledge is second-order knowledge, where we construct concepts and abstractions based on these mental representations, so intuitive knowledge is necessarily primary. And if logic is the science of intellectual knowledge, aesthetics for Croce is the science of intuitive knowledge, which is evidently a broader definition of aesthetics than we have become accustomed to, namely the philosophy of art and beauty. Croce's brand of idealism holds that there is no reality prior to its construction by the spirit. All mental representations we form of the world function as a creative ordering, and in doing so we articulate this information and make it comprehensible to ourselves. From this active notion of intuition Croce asserts that

'everything that is truly intuition or representation is also expression.'[60] In order to make sense of the stimuli we receive we must give it form, and this is *already expression*. The notion that sometimes befalls us that we have a vague idea of something ineffable but which we cannot quite express is simply rebuffed by Croce: if we truly *had* such ideas then we would have already expressed them. An idea is not an idea until it is expressed in the mind, before that it is simply a confused, inadequate feeling. From this it is a small and insignificant step to express it verbally or in writing. This recalls Hegel's rebuke to the Romantic notion that what is most supreme in the heart of the artist is inexpressible and hence there is an infinite depth to him beyond what his work discloses: 'On the contrary, his works are the best part and the truth of the artist; what he is [in his works], that he *is*; but what remains buried in his heart, that *is* he not.'[61] So since the idea is expression from its inception, the success of this idea consists entirely in *how* it has been expressed.

Nevertheless, when the clumsy physicality of the work seems not to live up to the 'dizzying stuff that dreams are made of', even if the artistic rendering stayed perfectly faithful to the idea, the artist may feel disappointed as if all that wondrous potential has been captured and grounded in this object. There may in fact be a perfectly simple, mundane explanation for this: it simply wasn't as successful an idea as he or she believed it to be. It is only by *testing* one's ideas through realisation that we discover their true nature and, in the words of Karl Popper, 'let

[60] Benedetto Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*, (Hereafter: *Aesthetic*), trans. Colin Lyas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 8.
[61] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 291.

our false theories die in our stead.'[62] The maxim that to think badly is to speak (or write) badly is thus for Croce a tautology, because to have an idea *is* to express it. If we are confused then we have not fully grasped or developed our own thought. It follows that we could not say of a work of art that there is fundamentally, at its core, something greater than what or how it has been expressed, as if it were adorned in shabby clothes. There is no dichotomy between the idea and its expression.

An immediate objection to this could be to refer to the numerous cases where a cover version of a song has been widely regarded to be superior to the original. A classic example is some of the early Bob Dylan compositions which were recorded in a somewhat rudimentary fashion and were arguably improved upon in later performances by artists such as The Byrds and Fairport Convention. But this would be to conflate two distinct meanings or even *stages* of 'expression': the song itself – the words, music, structure, etc – and its performance, which might better be termed *communication*. The Crocean response would be that the artistic *intuition-expression* proper is the song itself, and the execution is a technical matter only:

> So clearly are the two forms of activity distinguishable from each other that one could be a great artist but a poor technician […] but what is impossible is to be a great poet who writes poor verses, a great painter who does not

[62] 'Thus on the pre-scientific level, we are often ourselves destroyed, eliminated with our false theories; we perish with our false theories. On the scientific level, we systematically try to eliminate our false theories – we try to let our false theories die in our stead. This is the *critical method of error elimination.*' 'Conversation with Karl Popper' in Brian Magee, *Modern British Philosophy* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971) p. 73.

> know how to match colours […] in short, a great artist who does not know how to express himself.[63]

Proust, for example, was a notoriously poor editor and proof-reader of his manuscripts, which led not just to grammatical mistakes but to awkward errors of continuity and verisimilitude, but these are technical failings that in no way detract from the greatness of the work. They could even be said to be necessary side-effects of his manner of working, and so were he the kind of writer to pay more attention to such details he would not have written the *Recherche*, or at least it would have been a very different work. The notion of a great poet who lacks lyrical ability however, or a great painter with no eye for composition, is an oxymoron, for these are more than technical considerations, they are the very matter of the expression itself.

However, in the case of music this presents a problem, for it seems to suggest that there is no artistry in, for example, John Coltrane's masterful version of *My Favourite Things*. Is this mere technique, all the bona fide artistic work being that of Rodgers and Hammerstein? Clearly not, but this is a question specific to music and Croce (to my knowledge) does not address it. We can, however, appeal to his thoughts on translation for a possible answer. This is an activity Croce judges to be strictly speaking impossible, because one cannot extract the content of one expression and present it 'in the guise of another.'[64] So either the translation is slavishly faithful and hence a diminished version of the original, or:

[63] Benedetto Croce, *Guide to Aesthetics*, trans. Patrick Romanell (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965) p. 36.
[64] Croce, *Aesthetic*, p. 76.

> It creates an entirely new expression by putting the original expression back in the crucible and mixing it with the personal impressions of the one who calls himself the translator. In the first case the expression stays the same as it was originally, the other version being more or less inadequate, that is to say, not properly expression: in the other case there will indeed be two expressions, but with two different contents.[65]

Only an innovatively re-imagined interpretation of a song would be a separate expression and hence a work of art in its own right rather than a superfluous retread. However, this should not be taken to stand in contradiction to the assertion above which stated that the song itself is the expression proper and the performance a mere technical matter. A creative cover version would not be a better produced but otherwise unaltered version of the original, it would reinvent the song itself (this bearing obvious parallels with *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*.)

To return to Kant's example of the layman who may know what goes into the making of a work of art but simply lack the skill to execute it, this notion is firmly rejected by Croce. The difference between this layman and a great artist like Raphael is not simply the latter's skill in rendering the world in paint. Given Croce's insistence that there is no reality prior to its construction by our intuitive activity, it follows that the artist quite simply inhabits a different world to the rest of us. 'The painter is a painter because he sees what others only feel or glimpse but do not actually see.'[66] His power of representation is greater than ours and hence his power of expression is greater than ours, since they are one and the same. Although

[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., p. 10.

we may believe our visual activity directly acquaints us with things, whether it be a tree or a rose, etc., what we in truth see is an 'index of a book […] the labels that we have attached to things and which take the place of them.'[67] These indexes are perfectly sufficient for our everyday lives but are quite inadequate for the artist's purposes. Incidentally, an argument could be made that this account is compatible with current optical science, according to which the human eye, rather than taking in the entire visual field all at once, makes quick interrupted leaps from point to point called *saccades*, reassembling the whole thing into a coherent picture. Because of the different systems guiding the reconstruction process, the resulting mental representation is not objectively faithful the way a camera is, but is a personal interpretation. The fact that we see a continuous whole with no gaps or blanks is a mental illusion; we do not really 'see' detail, we represent *that* there is detail and label it as having features that we know should be there. This impression is confirmed when we turn our attention to it, thus reinforcing the sense that we saw it all along. This is demonstrated by what happens when one closely studies someone's face, even that of a close friend; it starts to change and become alien before one's eyes and it is as if one were seeing it completely anew. So we might suggest that it is legitimate to claim that there are differing abilities or capacities for constructing the visible world and that a great painter's visual assemblage could be more advanced than that of a non-artist. After all, the usual foundation and point of departure for life-drawing classes is to teach the students *how to see*. The amateur drawer's ineptness comes not (or not only) from a lack of skill with the pencil or charcoal but because one has to learn to see the world differently in order to make a

[67] Ibid.

two-dimensional rendering of it. It is a matter of ignoring or forgetting what one *knows* about the object and trying to merely *see* it.

So to the question as to whether this technology would make artists out of all of us, the proper Crocean response would be to say: not any more than we *already are* all artists. The important point to be made is that the difference between the aesthetic activity of the artist and that of the rest of us is not one of kind but only of degree. No technology could miraculously open the door to a horde of latent artists, liberated by the removal of the necessity for physical or technical skill of any kind. The *intuition-expression* of the artist, poet, composer, etc., will always be greater than that of the non-artist, thus it is countersensical to imagine a mechanism that would find the 'hidden talents' of someone who was unaware they had them, because aesthetic ability is not something buried within us that awaits activation, it is *already expressed*. This also provides a response to the tedious and idiotic complaint about much modern and contemporary art that 'anyone could do it', and that would be a resolute 'no they could not'. The complainant is obviously referring to the actual handiwork required to carry it out but this cannot be taken in isolation, as if mere virtuosity were the standard by which we judge art. As we have seen, no physical skill alone is enough to make one an artist. This would be akin to declaring that all it takes to become a great poet or novelist is a large vocabulary, when this only serves to make one at best a formidable Scrabble player.

So what is the status of the actual art object itself in Croce's model if all the work of the artist takes place 'internally' so to speak? If intuition *is* expression then the

work of art must be fully conceived or 'imagined' prior to its being put down on the canvas or score, etc.:

> The aesthetic stage is completely over and done with when impressions have been worked up into expressions. When we have captured the internal word, formed an apt and lively idea of a figure or a statue, found a musical motif, *expression has begun and ended: there is no need for anything else*. That we then open, or want to open, our mouths in order to speak, or our throats in order to sing, and, that is, to say aloud and full throat what we have already said and sung sotto voce within ourselves; and that we stretch out, or wish to stretch out, our hands to touch the keys of a piano, or take a brush or chisel, following, so to speak, on a larger scale those small and swift actions which we have already executed, translating these into a material where traces of them will remain more or less durably; – all this is something additional, and obeys quite different laws from those governing that earlier activity, laws which we are not for now concerned with: although from now on we recognise that the latter activity produces objects and is practical or voluntary. *It is customary to distinguish between the work of art which exists inside us and that which exists in the outside world: this way of speaking seems infelicitous to us, since the work of art (the aesthetic work) is always internal; and what is called the external work is no longer the work of art*.[68]

[68] Ibid., pp.56-7. [Italics added.]

We have here a curious intersection between high formalism and radical conceptualism, for this strongly recalls such conceptual mantras as this from Sol LeWitt's *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*: 'when an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.'[69] The physical embodiment given to an intuition is nothing more than an *aide-mémoire*. It is a marker, or pointer, to a work of art that has 'happened' – a physical supplement or indicator to *something that has already taken place*, something that was alive in the mind of the artist. If this rendition is successful then the physical entity will incite or reproduce in oneself and in others an already experienced or produced intuition. Much like what Derrida has said about the impossible ideality of the archive, in Croce's account the successful work of art '*comes to efface itself*, it becomes transparent and unessential so as to let the *origin* present itself in person. Live, without mediation and without delay.'[70] (Indeed it would not be difficult to undertake a deconstructionist reading of Croce here, and in a subsequent chapter we will have cause to interrogate the relationship between this 'secondary' external support and the 'primary' internal process, but we will go no further with such a reading here.)

So the work of art always refers to something that has *passed* and is nothing more than a reproduction. It is technically incorrect, according to Croce's account, to call a work of art beautiful; rather, it is '*simply an aid to the reproduction of internal beauty*.'[71] Aside from its parallels with conceptual art this also corresponds with, for example, accounts of The Beach Boys' composer Brian Wilson's creative

[69] Lewitt 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', p. 834.
[70] Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 93.
[71] Croce, *Aesthetic*, p. 114. [My emphasis.]

procedure. He has often described how he mentally conceived his 'pocket symphonies' in great detail and his exacting standards required of the musicians – demanding endless repeated takes – were in order to bring them to recreate what he could hear internally. Of course, what we can never be sure of is how far away from the original conception he may have travelled during this process. It may be that he believes himself to be remaining faithful to the mental image while imperceptibly modifying it with each performance. As LeWitt puts it, 'the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work the better. This eliminates the arbitrary, the capricious, and the subjective as much as possible.'[72] The less an artist leaves himself to do in the execution the 'purer' the idea can be and the less interference there will be between it and the final result.

It is clear that Croce's model (and LeWitt's for that matter) is the complete antithesis of any performative account of artistic creation. It is difficult to square Croce's theory of art with free improvisation or aleatoric practices in which there is supposedly nothing prior to the *act*, no notion of an outcome – everything begins and ends with the *doing*. While the American abstract expressionist belief in 'pure', disengaged expression is clearly an impossible ideal, there is undoubtedly something automatic and intuitive about such work that does not seem to be the result of a prior, deliberate mental construction. In free improvisatory musical performance a great deal of the skill resides in the ability to react to one's fellow players and follow the piece where it leads 'organically'. But if we were to play devil's advocate and try to stay with Croce we may want to problematise this notion of expression and insist on there *always* being a prior intuition, no matter how

[72] Lewitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', p. 835.

minimal. The great improvisers, from John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman to Derek Bailey and Evan Parker, would practice for so long and so intensely precisely so that 'in the moment' they can instantly bend their instrument to their will and elicit any desired sound or motif. This, it could be argued, is simply in microcosm what the musician-composer always does: she has something in mind that she intends to play and then aims to make the instrument produce it. Improvisation is often referred to as 'instant composition' and in the light of this we could say that it is still the same model of composition but the stakes, as it were, are higher because it is being played out live in front of an audience. Whereas through trial and experimentation the composer in a studio refines her work until satisfied, the free improviser has no such luxury. As such, mistakes, happy accidents and inadvertent inspiration abound, which lends to it a sense of being more 'alive' than a similar piece that has been composed and rehearsed. So the interval between intention and act may shrink to an infinitesimal gap but it does not disappear altogether. The idea that an improvisatory pianist, such as John Tilbury, would blindly hammer away at the keys with no notion of what he is doing is obviously false and does a disservice to his art.

Indeed Croce anticipates this potential objection to his depiction of the physical art object as a reproduction:

> To that theory we have outlined of physical beauty as simply an aid to the reproduction of internal beauty, that is, to expression, it could be objected: that the artist creates his expressions in the act of painting and sketching, writing and composing; and that, therefore, physical beauty, rather than

> coming after, can sometimes come before aesthetic beauty. That would be a superficial way of understanding the procedure of artists, who, in fact, do not even make strokes of the brush without first having seen by means of the imagination; and, if they have not yet seen, make brushstrokes, not to externalise their expressions (which do not then exist), but as if to try out and to have a simple point of support for their internal meditations and contemplations.[73]

It would be absurd to suggest that Jackson Pollock, to take an obvious example, 'intuited' in advance his chaotic compositions and dribbled the paint on the canvas in order to recreate them. But it would be equally wrong, and again, do him a gross injustice, if we were to assume that it was an entirely random procedure with no aesthetic guidance. For he obviously had some idea of what he wanted to express and worked the paint over until it approached his vision, with some things being rejected and others accepted. It could be argued that they are rejected or admitted based on whether it pleases aesthetically and this only comes *after* the gesture has already been made, but if the standard by which he judges whether it pleases or not is taken from elsewhere, according to some preconceived model then it will be derivative and shallow, which is obviously not the case. So this standard plainly comes from *within*; he keeps working at it until it looks the way he wants it to look.

Clearly it is very easy to summarily dismiss such systematic aesthetic philosophies as Croce's as outdated bourgeois dogmatism without ever attempting to engage with it. The more interesting and fruitful approach would be to read it

[73] Croce, *Aesthetic*, p. 114.

sympathetically and, as we have attempted to do here, take cases which seem to undermine its model and endeavour to overcome them rather than rushing to use these instances as so many nails in the coffin. As a basic precondition to subjecting a philosophical text to criticism one must surely pursue its internal logic as far as one can, otherwise the dogmatism is on the side of the critique rather than the critiqued. This is not to say that Croce's account is without fault, and such a comprehensive and totalising philosophy of artistic creation – treated as a consistent, homogeneous activity – is clearly no longer a tenable proposition, but its faults are often less interesting than its merits.[74] However, it cannot be denied that the process of art making entails a great deal of investigation, both material and conceptual, and often the work travels far from whatever the artist initially set out to achieve. The idea develops with and through the execution and a great deal of the artist's talent lies in the ability to follow it where it leads. Indeed, sometimes when the artist *thinks* she is doing one thing she may 'actually' be doing another and it is not until she can take a step back from it that she can see it for herself. The same point is made by John Dewey, who writes,

> [Between] conception and bringing to birth there lies a long period of gestation. During this period the inner material of emotion and idea is as much transformed through acting and being acted upon by objective material as the latter undergoes modification when it becomes a medium of expression.[75]

[74] For a concise compendium of the critiques standardly levelled at Croce (and his follower R.G. Collingwood) see Richard Wollheim, *Art and its Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) §22 pp. 40-3.
[75] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p.78-9.

Furthermore, we must surely ask how the art-as-intuition model can be squared with the intrinsicality of the *medium* to all expression. If an idea is always already expressed then it follows that it must be expressed *as* something, of which the intuition would be the internal visualisation. In our very brief discussion of Deleuze we suggested that it would be senseless to imagine that an artist conceived of an idea and only subsequently chooses the medium with which to express it, and initially we regarded this to be compatible with Croce's position. However, if the aesthetic intuition derives its content from the medium, which after all is contingent and historical, then this seems to undermine the ontological primacy of the idea over the physical object. For if the idea is merely a mental image *of* paint on canvas, or of sculpted marble, etc., then the material object itself can no longer be said to be something secondary, additional, or inessential.

We will develop this line of thought further in Chapter Three, but returning to the previous point regarding the transformation of the idea during the process of materialisation, it seems that here is where certain fundamental difficulties must surely arise with regard to an artistic practice that would utilise neurotechnologies to realise its objects. For would we not be dealing with something purely intentional and hence, in some respects, stillborn? Anecdotal accounts suggest that very often it is an accidental, unplanned or unforeseen element that turns out to be an artist's most cherished part of a work, something that could not have been predicted until it stands before them, and it is difficult to imagine how these happy by-products could result from such a mode of creation. It would be nothing more than an *intention* plucked straight from the mind with no physical negotiation, no aspect of working it through and overcoming problems. It seems totally to bypass or negate the

corporeality and the improvisation, not to mention the struggle, involved in making a work of art. Is it not thus all too easy?

Improvisation and Intuitive Music: Stockhausen, Bailey, Dennett

Slavoj Žižek likens the advancement of new media to the Hegelian negation of negation, which Žižek defines as a shifting of coordinates: Computers are first introduced as a means of more efficiently going about our activities, for example writing and printing newspapers. But before long the fatal question is raised: why continue to print and distribute newspapers at all, why not consider the virtual text on screen to be the finished product and make it accessible via the internet? Thus the old means are rendered obsolete by the very things brought in to make them more efficient and successful.[76] So if brain computer interfaces and cognitive imaging technologies were to shape how we produce and consume art, the art object itself may soon become an unnecessary intermediary. The next step would surely be to do away with the object altogether and have a form of brain-to-brain communication, where the aesthetic intuition in Croce's sense will be communicated directly from the mind of the artist to the mind of the receiver. The art object is thus literally effaced and fulfils Croce's description, becoming simply a communicated intuition without the need for the physical 'memory-aid'. This mirrors the trajectory of those conceptual art and experimental music practices we

[76] Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 2007) p. 231n. A more recent case is the online music website Spotify, which allows the user to listen to a vast database of music hosted on the site, without needing to download songs to their harddrive. So after MP3s all but supplanted Compact Disks and music is overwhelmingly bought and sold as digital files rather than rendered onto a physical format, this website has taken the logical step further and the question now is why even own music at all if it is merely invisible data? One can listen to it as often as one likes without using up memory space on one's computer.

touched upon above, where the object becomes less and less specific and more abstract to the point of dissolution. An emblematic example is La Monte Young's early piece *Poem for Chairs, Tables, and Benches, Etc., or Other Sound Sources* (1960). The duration of the piece was wholly variable, and the distinction between performers and audience obliterated. Any sound source emitted by anybody at all, or indeed any actions made, inside or outside the performance space, could be incorporated into the work. As Cornelius Cardew describes,

> The work developed into a kind of 'chamber opera' in which *any* activity, not necessarily even of a sound variety, could constitute one strand in the complex weave of the composition, which could last minutes, or weeks, or aeons. In fact it was quickly realised that all being and happening from the very beginning of time had been nothing more than a single gigantic performance of *Poem*.[77]

So going even further than John Cage's strictly defined, albeit arbitrary, timeframe in *4'33"*, with the *Poem* Young developed a piece whose borders were so permeable, its form so comprehensive, that it incorporated all of creation and at the same time dissolved into nothingness.

But perhaps one of the problems is that we inevitably view new technology as an *improvement* on older forms, evidenced by the all but complete replacement of analogue technology with digital in film, photography and music. Digital technology, however, is not simply a quicker, more efficient or easier route to the

[77] Quoted in Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 82.

same destination, it has a character all of its own. This is obviously not to voice a feeble Luddite complaint, bemoaning the pace of new media, but it is undeniable that digital reproductions of analogue processes, no matter how advanced, cannot recreate the warmth of reel-to-reel tape or 16mm film and when it attempts to do so it usually feels like a soulless simulacrum with no character or depth. Pushed to its extreme it leads to absurdly complicated procedures which try desperately to recreate the 'real thing', such as artificial tape hiss, or digital books with a touch screen that require the user to 'pretend' to turn the page by touching the bottom right hand corner of the screen and dragging it across, or even computer keyboards which mimic the key resistance of an old-fashioned typewriter. There is surely no need for such pointless kitsch simulations, which are often frustratingly un-user friendly in any event. Having said this, digital technology possesses huge capabilities that extend far beyond the reach of analogue systems, but whose creative potential remains largely untapped. The problem is in nostalgically trying to retain the old forms but with newer means. The most creatively freeing approach would be to advocate a split that could signal a revival in analogue and free up the capabilities of digital technology from mere slick replication. With this in mind, perhaps we have been guilty thus far of viewing this technology as a threat to traditional art-making methods rather than as a wholly new means of expression that can exist concurrently. It is especially jarring to characterise it negatively when its primary purpose, as stated earlier, is to enable those with physical disabilities to compose and perform music. And after all, nobody is suggesting that musicians will all throw away their instruments and painters their brushes. So perhaps it would be beneficial to turn our attention to some of the things that could and could not be achieved via these means in an attempt to delineate how this could be regarded as

an entirely new form of creation rather than viewing it as some diminished travesty of existing art practices.

Stockhausen described how during his early musical education music was treated and spoken about exclusively as a rational product, with its intuitive aspect completely suppressed. While much of his early work could be termed 'rational music', realised through intellectual energy, in his later compositions he endeavoured to create a space for a form of totally free improvisation, liberated from the conventions and idioms of jazz or any other tradition, that he named 'intuitive music'. His piece *IT* is one such case, consisting of a textual score which simply instructs the performer to 'think NOTHING. Wait until it is absolutely still within you. When you have attained this begin to play. As soon as you start to think, stop and try to re-attain the state of NON-THINKING. Then continue playing.'[78] While this should probably be considered an ideal to be approached by the performer rather than something that can be literally put into practice, it is certainly a requirement of any freely expressive performance for the player to, in a sense, disengage their conscious activity and play without thinking about what they are doing. This is true of any automatic motor activity, from table-tennis to touch-typing; if one starts to think about what one is doing it is as if a spell had been broken and what before came naturally and with ease now becomes awkward and laboured. This is the difference between what cognitive scientists call the implicit and the explicit systems of learning. A receptionist may be an expert typist but be unable to recite from memory the order in which the letters appear on the keyboard. Similarly, many proficient musicians find that they are incapable of teaching others

[78] *Stockhausen on Music*, compiled by Robin Maconie (London: Boyars, 2000) p. 120.

how to play the instrument because this would require what has been learned implicitly to be re-learned explicitly, which demands considerable time and effort. The same is true of a person's native language, and teaching English to foreign students requires a great deal more than merely knowing how to speak it. So implicit learning is learning-through-doing and takes place largely in the absence of explicit knowledge about what has been acquired and any amount of transfer of skill from implicit to explicit control during the act will be very detrimental to its performance.[79]

What remains difficult to conceive is how such spontaneous instinctive activity could be possible with music created through the BCI, for it must surely always be an *explicit, deliberate* act of thought to induce the computer to play the intended note. If one were to 'let go' in the way a performer with an instrument would then there would be nothing that the computer could identify or recognise. Put more bluntly, if you are not *thinking* of anything, or at least anything specific, how could the computer play anything? Stockhausen says of intuitive music that, 'acting, or listening, or doing something without thinking, is the state of pure intuitive activity, not requiring to use the brain as a control'.[80] However, with this system by definition the brain is the *only* control, so would it be that of the two paradigms Stockhausen describes only the former, rational music, would be possible with the BCI system?

[79] Arne Dietrich in his book *Introduction to Consciousness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) relates how John McEnroe knew this intuitively and often used it to his advantage: 'The story is told that when he played an opponent who was "in the zone" and could do no wrong with his, say, forehand, McEnroe would call it to his attention by praising his rival on his excellent forehand during the switching of sides.' p. 172.
[80] *Stockhausen on Music*, p. 124.

The renowned guitarist Derek Bailey identified two distinct improvisatory attitudes towards the instrument, which he called the pro- and anti-instrument camps. For the former, the instrument is the be-all and end-all of performance and the performer is merely there to tease out all of its capabilities and sonic potential. This leads to modifications, preparations and extensions of the instrument, all by way of doing full justice to its possibilities and respecting its limitations. For this position there can surely be no room for incorporation into the BCI model of creation as it is an inherently corporal activity.[81] On the other hand, 'the anti-instrument attitude might be presented as: "The instrument comes between the player and his music" […] Technically, the instrument has to be defeated. *The aim is to do on the instrument what you could do if you could play without an instrument.*'[82] Here the instrument stands in the way between the performer and his expression and is fundamentally an inconvenience, or even an irrelevance, since it is the player and his inspiration alone that counts. So it should make little difference *what* the instrument is, since it is merely a conduit, which is why the instruments favoured by such performers usually have an extremely limited capacity – the idea being that a more direct expressiveness is possible when the opportunities for technical virtuosity are minimised. Perhaps the BCI would be embraced by such performers as the ultimate victory of expressiveness over the tyranny of the instrument. But this brings us back to the point reached above, namely how to conceive of a freely expressive form of music using a system that would require deliberate, concentrated thought.

[81] Unless that is, the interface itself were to be considered as an 'instrument' to be exploited in some way. However the whole point here is that the *instrumentality*, physicality or materiality of the mediating vehicle is to be effaced. In subsequent chapters we will have cause to problematise this clear distinction between the internal and the external and question the possibility of any *direct*, unmediated form of creation.

[82] Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993) p. 101. [My emphasis.]

However, it is perhaps based on a common misconception of the brain and an underestimation of this technology to suggest that it could only respond to explicit, deliberate thought. The activities carried out 'implicitly' are still controlled by the brain, despite the misleading term in popular usage 'muscle memory'. In email correspondence, Dr. Mick Grierson of Goldsmiths, University of London, who has developed his own version of the BCI for real-time performance and composition has expressed his belief that as the technology progresses and becomes more sophisticated – and as the user becomes more familiar with the process – it could become intuitive in a similar way to using an instrument.[83] To return to the monkeys who learned to feed themselves using a brain-controlled robotic arm (and similar experiments carried out on human volunteers), after the initial strangeness it was soon assimilated into unconscious activity and became integrated into its normal behavioural routine much more quickly than any of the scientists anticipated. Effectively this is the difference between explicitly thinking 'now I am going to move the arm' and doing it unconsciously as if it were a part of the user's body. Already, in the relatively early stages of development of the BCI technology for musical performance, it is apparently becoming increasingly easy to 'forget' about the interface, in an analogous way to when one reaches a certain level of skill with an instrument and can play without having to think about what one is doing.[84] This potentially suggests an even truer fulfilment of Stockhausen's ideal of intuitive music, something which truly comes 'from within', bypassing our conscious control. Speculatively, we could perhaps extend it to other art forms: for example if

[83] Quote: 'I'd hazard that the more familiar one becomes with the process, physical or not, the more intuitive it will be - i.e. it will pass from working memory to long term memory. The body/brain will assimilate the activity into unconscious activity, assuming that it is happening enough. Like when you play the same scale enough times, eventually, you don't have to think about it.' (Personal communication with the author, 22.02.10)
[84] Ibid.

a painter or sculptor were to use a brain-controlled mechanical arm like the one described above would this approach the ideal of unmediated expression that Cy Twombly and others strove after? Or alternatively would it realise Duchamp's intention regarding his early paintings: 'I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting. I was much more interested in recreating ideas in painting […] I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind.'[85] Or even both of these models simultaneously? But any conjecture with regards to what such art would actually *sound* or *look like* and whether radically new forms of expression would accompany the new means must remain open. The question here still concerns the nature of such a means of mind-creation itself, not the outcome.

We can surely discount the literary arts from consideration here, because there is no conceivable way a computer could realise something from one's brain in a language if it was not already expressed linguistically. Croce regards the divisions of the arts as arbitrary and artificial (and genres even more so), each intuition being singular and expressing itself in its own way, whether as a painting, a piece of music or a poem, etc.; but it would seem that for our present purposes literature presents a special case. If something were to spring out from within us as a word that we had not ourselves consciously expressed, what right would we have to call it a thought of ours? If a machine scans my brain and expresses some vague preverbal feeling in a word then it would be more like a description of a mental state than an unexpressed thought. If I am thinking of something that I cannot formulate into words, then in what precise sense am I 'thinking' at all? And coming back to the discussion above regarding how an artist may struggle to physically express her

[85] Cited in Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, p. 27.

ideas, could the same be said for a poet or novelist? Has she even had the idea until she has found the words to express them, and then is there really any difference or disjuncture between a thought and its verbal or written expression? Perhaps only in that we are not umbilically attached to it any more and cannot control its interpretation or how it is understood; but more essentially, between the words I intend to say and those I say does anything have to be overcome? While writing the present work I have often hesitated over the phrasing, knowing essentially what I mean to say but being unable to find the suitable expression. Sometimes I do recall it, other times I have had to reconcile myself with not expressing it exactly as I would have wanted. It seems doubtful that a computer software would be able to identify the intended word from my brain activity if I cannot call it to mind myself. Interestingly, scientists have found that each of the 40 or so phonemes of which the English language is made up has a unique signal in the brain which can be detected as we form a word, either aloud or only in thought. Although there is not yet the capacity directly to read one's inner thoughts and translate them into words, the principle is firmly established.[86] For such thoughts to be deciphered of course, they must be fully articulated into words otherwise there would be nothing for the computer to interpret. So we must agree with Croce here that a thought or intuition that is not expressed is an oxymoron. We may like to flatter ourselves that the mind is a breeding ground of ideas and thoughts that are more than we can consciously put into words, but this seems exceedingly naïve.

The American philosopher Daniel Dennett discusses the process by which we find the words to say in ordinary speech and opposes what he calls the 'Bureaucratic'

[86] X. Pei et al, 'Decoding Vowels and Consonants in Spoken and Imagined Words Using Electrocorticographic Signals in Humans', *Journal of Neural Engineering* 8, no. 4 (2011): pp. 046028.

model of speech generation to the 'Pandemonium' model. This replaces the notion of a central *meaner* – an inner Cartesian homunculus with something he intends to say and then trying to find the words to express it – with a quasi-evolutionary process, where meaning is generated in and through the process of selecting words rather than coming before: 'There is thus not one source of meaning, but many shifting sources, opportunistically developed out of the search for the right words.'[87] There is an internal back and forth competition amongst the words and the communicative intentions, and those that win out make their appearance in an utterance which is the *first time* that those words and intentions are manifested and made known to the speaker. It is not too much of a leap to extend this to artistic intentions and suggest that they too are generated *through* the act of realisation and not in advance.

Dennett stresses how we sometimes do not know why we say certain things and we attribute meaning to them as we hear ourselves speaking. The same can be said for a painter, musician, novelist or philosopher finding inspiration and being surprised by what they discover themselves doing:

> As E.M. Forster put it, 'How do I know what I think until I see what I say?' We often do discover what we think (and hence what we mean) by reflecting on what we find ourselves saying – and not correcting. So we are, at least on those occasions, in the same boat as our external critics and

[87] Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1991) p. 241.

> interpreters, encountering a bit of text and putting the best reading on it that we can find.[88]

This would appear to be diametrically opposed to Croce's model, because here there can be no internal self who is 'there' to intuit the outcome prior to setting the process of realisation in motion. It is also clear that this has implications for the brain technologies, because as has been noted it would require for the communicative or artistic intentions to be fully known and worked out prior to their expression. This again calls into question the possibility of improvisation or spontaneity when using these interfaces. Suggesting that any of these technologies could express a preconscious thought that we have not yet ourselves expressed would be to fall into the bureaucratic paradigm, positing a fully self-transparent inner controller who hands out orders to underlings to find the correct words to match his intentions. If this were the case then it would not be too much of a stretch to suggest that this latter task could also be accomplished by a computer, but this assessment should be avoided.

To rescue Croce here, and also a form of literary improvisation through the BCI, we would stress that firstly there is no reason to assume that the spontaneous process through which we find ourselves taken aback by our own ideas or expressions should *only* apply to those that we externalise and hence only in the process *of* this externalisation. Surely an idea can itself go through this evolution and development, growing out instinctively as it is worked through. It is not uncommon in certain situations, where what one says needs to be carefully worded, to find

[88] Ibid., p. 245.

oneself rehearsing what one wants to say internally beforehand. So the evolutionary procedure described by Dennett through which words and meanings are generated by no means requires there always to be an actual spoken utterance. The on-the-hoof formation of communicative intentions could be compared to the earlier description of the methods of an artist such as Jackson Pollock and how this was shown to be not necessarily in conflict with a model of prior, internal aesthetic intuitions. Abandoning the Cartesian homunculus thus need not necessarily entail abandoning the notion of 'ideas' altogether. Furthermore, as evidenced by the Freudian exercise of free association, words and phrases can spew out of us which seem to originate outside of our conscious control, so applying this to an artistic context we could quite easily envisage using this technology to engage in something akin to the surrealist practice of *écriture automatique,* or even the stream of consciousness techniques of Proust, Virginia Woolf and Jack Kerouac. Whether or not we would want to assign a psychoanalytical significance to such products, or aesthetic merit for that matter, would be debatable, but it would certainly be an instant, unpremeditated form of creation.

We are now in a position to move away from our preliminary consideration of the implications these technologies may carry for artistic activity and towards a more fundamental investigation into the very gap between the 'in here' of thought and the 'out there' of external actuality that has lain at the root of the problem. It may transpire that the power or ability granted to us by these technologies, by bridging, cancelling, or effacing this gap, could fundamentally alter not just the notion of artistic creation but actually what it means to be a subject, putting the very condition of our finitude and of our freedom or spontaneity at stake.

Chapter Two: Intellectual Intuition and Finite Creativity.

Thus what the study of nature and of the human being teaches us sufficiently elsewhere may well be correct here also, viz., that the inscrutable wisdom through which we exist is not less worthy of veneration in what it has refused us than in what it has allotted us.

– Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*[1]

Throughout our previous chapter the question that insistently returned again and again was this: what would become of the creative process if the temporal and ontological gap between the artist's intention-to-create and the piece of work itself were to be closed, so that 'mere thought' and actuality would coincide: would this amount to a direct, unmediated form of expression? The question that faces us now is, just what kind of 'creation' would such a faculty be? What would it mean for us to be given the ability to manipulate external reality via thought alone? Or for the 'inner' contents of the mind to be immediately transposed 'outside' as an object? Here a very intriguing remark from Slavoj Žižek's *The Parallax View* will come to our aid and help guide us in this direction. Roughly a third of this, his self-proclaimed *magnum opus*,[2] is devoted to the cognitive sciences and their implications for our conceptions of consciousness, subjectivity and free will. In this context Žižek briefly addresses the BCI technology we have been discussing, in particular the aforementioned monkeys who learned to feed themselves using a brain-controlled mechanical arm, as well as similar experiments carried out on human volunteers playing computer games which had been programmed to

[1] Trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002) AA 147.
[2] Declared in the feature film *Žižek!*, Dir. Astra Taylor, 2005.

recognise brain activity corresponding to movements of the joystick, the result being that the joystick was no longer necessary and the game could be controlled merely by their thoughts. As Žižek writes,

> Even Steven Hawking's proverbial little finger – the minimal link between his mind and outside reality, the only part of his paralysed body that Hawking can move – will thus no longer be necessary: with my mind I can directly cause objects to move […] In the terms of German Idealism, this means that what Kant called 'intellectual intuition' – the closing of the gap between mind and reality, a mind-process which, in a causal way, directly influences reality, this capacity that Kant attributed only to the infinite mind of God – is now potentially available to all of us, that is to say, we are potentially deprived of one of the basic features of our finitude. And as we learned from Kant as well as from Freud, this gap of finitude is at the same time the resource of our creativity […] the direct short circuit between mind and reality implies the prospect of a radical closure.[3]

There are three significant claims here: the first is that a capacity of thought characterised as belonging only to God is made available to us by these technologies; the second is that this capacity would enable us to overcome our finitude; and the third is that this very overcoming of finitude, rather than bestowing upon us a new form of unconditional freedom would actually deprive us of the very form of creativity that is particular to us. However, the impact of such a revolution would surely not only implicate future acts; it would cast its shadow

[3] Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: The MIT Press, 2006) p. 192-3.

back retroactively, suggesting that perhaps human finitude, and creativity, are not what we thought they were. So this 'deprivation' would be total and irreversible, and the genie cannot be put back into the bottle once it has been opened.

The aim of the present chapter has thus been outlined; it will be an attempt to grapple with this rather extraordinary claim which, characteristically, Žižek does not develop further but leaves as a tantalising, almost throwaway remark. This will necessitate firstly our coming to a thorough understanding of this notion of *intellectual intuition* in its precise Kantian formulation, foregoing the various transformations and modifications this term subsequently underwent in the hands of Fichte and Schelling. We must then consider how and in what respects our freedom or creativity rests on finitude, such that any 'overcoming' of finitude would put this freedom at stake.

The task of providing a coherent, univocal definition of intellectual intuition (or the intuitive or archetypal intellect which would possess such a faculty) is a particularly tortuous one. All the references Kant makes to it – and it appears in all three *Critiques* as well as numerous other works – are 'episodic', dealing with problems that at first sight appear heterogeneous; thus it is a slippery, multifaceted concept.[4] This is no doubt due to the fact that it is always used negatively or problematically; indeed the main thematic treatments of it in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (see in particular B68, B72, B145, B153, B307) were only added in the second edition, which provides a clue to its function as a bolster for Kant's system, but as a limit

[4] In fact Moltke S. Gram, in his article 'Intellectual Intuition: The Continuity Thesis', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42, no. 2 (1981): pp. 287-304, has argued that Kant does not consider intellectual intuition to be a unitary concept at all, introducing it at different times to treat of logically independent problems. However, going against this thesis I will be attempting to draw together the different strands of intellectual intuition to form a consistent whole.

rather than a positive addition. It functions primarily in order to demonstrate that as soon as we step outside of this system we immediately involve ourselves in contradictions and absurdities. Thus it is invoked merely to ground our finite cognition and root it in the senses, and is introduced only to be denied as a possibility.

The theme of the intuitive intellect as a faculty of the infinite mind of God appears in Kant's work as early as the *Dissertation on the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World* of 1770, where he writes, 'the divine intuition [is] the cause, not the consequence, of objects'.[5] Two years later, in the letter to Marcus Herz in which he famously announces his readiness to embark on the critical project, he returns to it with regard to the correspondence between the object of our representation and the representation itself: What, he asks, guarantees the reference of the internal representation to the external object? If the former is merely the result of the subject's being affected by the latter then it can be explained as of cause to effect. Otherwise, if the representation was '*active*' in its relation to the object – 'i.e., *if the object were produced by the representation itself* (as one thinks of divine cognitions as the archetypes of things)' – then we could likewise understand the congruence between internal and external:

> And so one can at least understand the possibility of both an *archetypal* intellect, upon whose intuition the things themselves are grounded, as well

[5] *Kant's Inaugural Dissertation of 1770*, trans. W. Eckoff, Reprint Ed. (Indianapolis: Kessinger, 2004) § 10, p. 56.

> as an *ectypal* intellect, which attains the data of its logical activity from the sensuous intuition of things.[6]

From these brief readings we can already begin to understand what Žižek has in mind and why for him such a divine faculty is 'potentially available to all of us'. The representations in the mind of God are characterised as being the ground or cause of the objects themselves, while the opposite is the case for human cognition. However, what these technologies facilitate is for a purely psychical event to have real effects in the outside world and even for it to be made manifest as an object, thereby seemingly transforming our passive representations into the active ground of physical events.

Ob-jects and E-jects

Kant develops his system of Transcendental Idealism in opposition to what he calls Transcendental *Realism*, the latter referring to all pre-critical metaphysics which tacitly assume that the things as they appear to us are the same as they are outside of any reference to our faculties of cognition. Such a doctrine assumes an eternal God's-eye perspective as the normative, ideal archetype, of which our human perspective is but a less perfect, confused, although strictly homogeneous version. The belief is that the further we extend our understanding of the way things are – the structure of being – the closer we come to absolute knowledge.[7] The move Kant instigates is to radically separate finite human cognition from infinite divine

[6] Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics and the Letter to Marcus Herz, February 1772*. 2nd Ed., trans. James Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001) p. 118 / AA 130. [My emphasis.]
[7] The centrality of this opposition between Transcendental Idealism and Transcendental Realism to Kant's critical philosophy is convincingly insisted upon by Henry Allison in *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defence*, 2nd ed., (London: Yale University Press, 2004)

cognition, and this is at the root of the famous division into appearances and things in themselves, this dichotomy being the difference between things as they appear from our human standpoint and the same things as seen in their intrinsic being by a divine observer. The things that we experience outside of us, while being *empirically real* are *transcendentally ideal*, i.e., they are mere appearances which conform to our modes of representation, which does not mean that they are mere illusion or false semblance. As is commonly known, for Kant space and time are nothing but the pure forms of our intuition and do not exist as self-subsistent real entities or real relations between entities. Space is the pure form of outer intuition and the condition of everything that appears to us externally, and time is the pure form of inner intuition, so the condition of everything that appears as such. Things in themselves, as seen from the perspective of the Supreme Being, have neither a position or extension in space nor a temporal duration, but this negative description is as far as our knowledge can stretch and beyond it we can know nothing at all about how things may be outside of our mode of intuiting them.

As Kant states in the first lines of the Transcendental Aesthetic, and hence the first lines of the *Critique of Pure Reason* proper, intuition is the means by which our cognition refers directly to an object, and all thought refers only mediately to these objects, gathering and ordering the data that has been intuitively given:

> Intuition, however, takes place only insofar as the object is given to us; but that, in turn, is possible only – for us human beings, at any rate – by the

> mind's being affected in a certain manner […] Hence by means of sensibility objects are *given* to us, and it alone supplies us with *intuitions*.[8]

So there are two features to our faculty of intuition, the first and primary factor being that the objects pre-exist and condition the act of intuition, hence it is *receptive* and not *productive*. Secondly, since thought cannot directly access these beings it must take place through the sense-organs, therefore it is *sensible* rather than *intellectual*, and we can have no knowledge and no access at all to objects without those objects being first intuited in this way:

> Our kind of intuition is called sensible because it is *not original*. I.e., it is not such that through this intuition itself the existence of its object is given (the latter being a kind of intuition that, as far as we can see, can belong only to the original being). Rather, our kind of intuition is dependent on the existence of the object, and hence is possible only by the object's affecting the subject's capacity to present […] For the reason just set forth, intellectual intuition seems to belong solely to the original being, and never to a being that is dependent as regards both its existence and its intuition (an intuition that determines that being's existence by reference to given objects).[9]

As we saw in the passage from the letter to Marcus Herz, Kant sees only two possible bases for the relationship between our intuition of an object and the object thus intuited: one must be the ground of the other. Since declaring our intuition to

[8] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Hereafter: *CPR*) A19/B33. (All references are to the Werner S. Pluhar translation, previously cited.)
[9] Ibid., B72.

be the grounding cause would see us fall into the 'material idealism' of Berkeley, whereby objects themselves only exist in and for an act of perception, the object must be the cause of the intuition. But the *appearance* of that object in perception is transcendentally constituted by our *a priori* forms of representation, space and time, which do not exist outside of us but are the conditions which allow something to become an object for us. Our intuition is only capable of receiving something given, and since all thought only aims at the material so given we are entirely *dependent* on these given objects which exist in their own right, and without them we can have no knowledge. But Kant also says something more than this: we are dependent on the receptivity of our intuition not merely for our knowledge of the external world but also in terms of our very *existence*, that existence being determined 'by reference to given objects'. This point is intended as a further defence against material idealism, whether of the 'dogmatic' kind associated with Berkeley or the 'problematic idealism' of Descartes, the latter asserting that absolute certainty belongs only to inner experience, meaning the existence of external reality can only be inferred and never proven. But what Kant means to demonstrate is that it is only by reference to the objects of outer intuition that we are able to determine *our own* existence, thus any doubt or outright denial of the existence of an external world is precluded. But it is not until the 'Refutation of Idealism' some two hundred pages later that this is fully accounted for.

As we have seen, the pure form of inner intuition, that wherein I intuit my own activity abstracted from all empirical elements, is time. But I can only sense something as determined *in* time by measuring it against something permanent, for without perception of something permanent all changes of time would have no

'anchor' as it were, and there would be nothing to connect the successive moments from disappearing as soon as they arrive and for no continuity to be detected. This permanent *something* can obviously not be a mere representation within me if it is to be something *against which* I measure myself, so 'determination of my existence in time is possible only through the existence of actual things that I perceive outside me.'[10] (This notion of 'permanence' as the condition of time perception will be returned to and clarified later.) I have intellectual consciousness of my existence only as the bare *I think* of transcendental apperception but this is nothing without sensuous intuition. If, on the other hand, 'with that intellectual consciousness of my existence I could at the same time link a determination of my existence through *intellectual intuition*, then this determination would not include necessarily the consciousness of a relation to something outside me.'[11] Only a being in possession of such a faculty could through the mere *thought* of itself simultaneously *determine* itself, because that act of the intellect would, through its immediate access to the 'object' (the self), simultaneously create it and all its determinations, *causa sui,* and would not be dependent upon external objects. Precisely because we are not in possession of such a faculty we can only gain knowledge even of our own selves through the receptivity of intuition and the independent existence of external objects. So Kant's rejoinder to the empirical idealist or the sceptic is to say that without objective outer experience, which to them is doubtful, there would be no *inner* experience. Therefore receptivity is primordial; our intuition is not receptive simply because we happen to have the particular sense organs that we do, rather it is only because we are in the midst of beings that are not of our creation and not under our power that we must be in possession of organs of sensibility through

[10] Ibid., B276.
[11] Ibid., Second Edition Preface, Bxl.

which these beings can make themselves known. This predicament of ours where we find ourselves always-already amidst a pre-given world of objects upon which we are reliant and over which we are not master is what Heidegger calls facticity, or thrownness, and as we shall see, our being thus thrown into a world, and the impossibility of getting 'behind' ourselves, is for Kant as well as Heidegger, the essence of our status as finite beings and the very condition of our freedom.

Our mind, as discursive, is split into a faculty of receptivity – intuition – and spontaneity – understanding. The latter is spontaneous because it functions as an active ordering or *synthesis* of sensible data. No order or composition is taken in through the senses, which without the unity bestowed upon it by thought is merely a 'blind play of representations'.[12] This point is intended to contest Hume's denial of the self and its reduction to mere 'bundles' of perceptions or sensations. In Kant's account these 'bundles', without something constant accompanying them – namely the synthesis enacted by the transcendental unity of apperception – would never lead to a feeling of selfhood at all and the *I* itself, if it were *mere receptivity*, would dissolve amidst the confusion of sense-impressions. This unity of apperception, however, as we have just touched on above and will return to in more detail, does not amount to *knowledge* of the self. It is merely intellectual and an empty point of formal unity. By way of this – and through the categories (pure *a priori* concepts of understanding) – thought brings the 'blind play of representations' to objective knowledge of objects: 'thus *receptivity* can make cognition possible only when combined with *spontaneity*.'[13]

[12] Ibid., A112.
[13] Ibid., A97.

Due to this productive, spontaneous nature of thought we can begin to see more clearly why an intuition that would be *intellectual* (or an understanding that is intuitive) could not be considered to be *receptive*, but must necessarily be a form of cognition which would render the object of thought immediately present through the mere act of thinking it. This is because the understanding does not derive its concepts *from* experience but rather brings them *to* experience. If thought were not reliant for its objects on their being given from elsewhere but could somehow communicate with them directly, the only way this relation could be conceived is if thought was itself the ground of that object. Thus, as we can see, our intuition is finite in two fundamental respects: firstly because it is dependent upon the object being given and cannot freely create the objects that it intuits, and secondly, because it needs to be supplemented by understanding in order to possess knowledge, that is, that the object intuited is not fully transparent to that act of intuition but needs to be determined by thought. The infinite mind of God could not conceivably be dependent upon objects to which it has to conform because this would amount to a limitation and the Supreme Being, as infinite, could have no such limitations, so its objects must spring forth from the cognition itself. Indeed, as Heidegger puts it,

> Absolute cognition itself reveals the essent [existent being] in the act of letting it come forth and possesses it 'only' as that which arises from this very act, i.e., as e-ject [*Ent-stand*]. Insofar as the essent is manifest to absolute intuition, it 'is' precisely in its coming-into-Being. It is the essent as essent in itself, i.e., not as object. Strictly speaking, then, we fail to hit

> upon the essence of infinite knowledge if we say its 'object' is produced in the very act of intuition.[14]

So we think naïvely if, in an anthropocentric way, we conceive of God's relation to objects (or 'e-jects') as something that springs 'out' from the mind, in the way that we would imagine such an ability in ourselves; that is, as something *inner* which takes on substantial being *outside* the mind. For the infinite mind there could be no 'outside' against which it could define an 'inside', for as we saw, externality itself – space – is only a form of human intuition and as such is a mark of finitude. Once this being of thought would have taken on objectivity then it would no longer be under the mind's power and would exist in its own right, regardless of how it came into existence.[15] So the arising in and for the act of intuition *is* the mode of being that such 'e-jects' would have. Our knowledge, as finite, 'necessarily conceals' the thing in itself and 'because the appearance gives the essent only as ob-ject, it is basically impossible for it to let the essent be seen as e-ject.'[16]

However, here we are faced with a problem which Kant seemingly cannot address, namely of accounting for our world of appearances *from the perspective of the Supreme Being*. If things in themselves remain completely under God's power and their mode of being is identical with their arising in thought, then what does God

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[14] Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Hereafter: *KPM*), trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962) p. 36.
[15] As Sartre puts it in the 'Introduction' to *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), 'being, if it is suddenly placed outside the subjective by the fulguration of which Leibniz speaks, can only affirm itself as distinct from and opposed to its creator; otherwise it dissolves in him. The theory of perpetual creation, by removing from being what the Germans call *Selbständigkeit*, makes it disappear in the divine subjectivity. If being exists as over against God, it is its own support; it does not preserve the least trace of divine creation. In a word, even if it had been created, being-in-itself would be *inexplicable* in terms of creation; for it assumes its being beyond the creation.' p. 20.
[16] *KPM*, p. 38.

know of spatiotemporal determinations? The only way of resolving this difficulty is by making the split, so to speak, 'symmetrically asymmetric', so that not only is it the case that we, as finite beings, cannot know anything of the things as they are in themselves, also from the side of the things in themselves it cannot be accounted for as to where or why it splits off into appearance. Each 'side' must structurally obscure the other. But this is as much as saying that there is something, namely the finite world of appearance, that is outside of God's power, which can only undermine His status as supreme. If to resolve this situation we say simply that it is a consequence of our restricted view of the things in themselves – as they *really* are – then we return to a pre-critical metaphysics that treats the finite as merely the limited perspective on the infinite; but finitude cannot be incorporated into the infinite as of the part to the whole. In short, if we *start* from the side of the infinite there is no way of accounting for how the finite comes to be, so for Kant we can only start from the side of the finite. The things in themselves can be conceived only as regards how they must be determined *for us*; the infinite cannot be thought in itself but only in its *relation* to the finite. What this leaves unasked and incapable of being asked is the question of finitude itself: why finitude? The only way this question could be addressed is by precisely leaving finitude behind, in a Hegelian move, and accounting for it as the self-limitation of the absolute, but for Kant this would be wholly illegitimate. More than once Kant stresses that we cannot ask *why these categories and no others*, or *why do we have the particular form of intuition that we do*, because here we encounter the unsurpassable limits of our knowledge.[17] However, in a strangely paradoxical fashion, this very limitation of our knowledge seems to privilege our perspective over that of the Supreme Being, since from *our*

[17] Cf. for example, *CPR*, B145-6.

side, presupposing finitude as already given, we *can* account for things in themselves – as the necessary substrate of appearance – and to a certain extent we can determine them as such. Conversely, from the *other* side, finitude is completely incomprehensible and unaccountable. These are themes that will be returned to and fleshed out, but for now let us set it aside and return to our analysis of the Kantian structure of cognition.

Possibility and Actuality

If our intuition, as receptive, is the source of the finitude of our knowledge, then does this mean that thought, if it were capable of being liberated from sensuous intuition, would be *freely* productive and hence creative? As Kant describes,

> [The laws and regularity that we find in nature] are not taken from experience; rather they must provide appearances with the latter's law-governedness, and exactly thereby make experience possible. Hence understanding is not merely a power of making rules for oneself by comparing appearances; understanding is itself legislative for nature. I.e., without understanding there would not be any nature at all, i.e., any synthetic unity of the manifold of appearances according to rules.[18]

This law-giving power of the understanding, along with the transcendental ideality of space and time, is of course the crux of Kant's 'Copernican revolution'. Since the objects of experience are not encountered as they are in themselves but only as

[18] *CPR*, A126.

they appear to us then they must conform to *our* modes of presentation rather than the other way around. So the law that the same effect will always follow from a given cause is necessary because it is a condition of our experience, not because the things themselves are so arranged. If this were not the case, Kant argues, then all knowledge would be empirical and no universal, necessary laws could be known, since experience could never acquaint us with necessity but only with what has so far been the case. No amount of observation of an event following on from another event could lead us to the knowledge of the necessity of such a correspondence. This is why Kant can say that 'the conditions for the *possibility of experience* as such are simultaneously conditions for the *possibility of objects of experience*.'[19]

The understanding, then, is spontaneous, and since its pure concepts (categories) are not derived from experience it is seemingly independent from intuition, while the latter, it would appear, is wholly dependent upon the former. Thus there is cause to claim, as Kant himself does in his *Inaugural Dissertation*, that the senses provide us with 'the representation of things *as they appear*, while the intellectual presentations are things *as they are*.'[20] This is the distinction between the respective worlds of phenomena and noumena, or alternatively *mundus sensibilis* and *mundus intelligibilis*. For dogmatic metaphysics (including, to a certain extent, the early Kant), the world of phenomena is that which we see, sense, touch, hear, in our day to day existence, while the world of noumena is the purely rational world of pure understanding. Hence the body keeps us tied us down to the material world of sense but the understanding, through logical inference, can ascend freely into the absolute. However, for Kant after the critical turn this cannot be the case, because

[19] Ibid., A158/B197.
[20] *Kant's Inaugural Dissertation*, § 4, p. 51.

the understanding is nothing but a faculty of rules for ordering the sensible manifold and without that data it is completely empty, hence 'through [the categories] alone we are unable to think or determine any object.'[21] This is why Heidegger characterises the understanding as *even more* finite than intuition, because intuition is primary and provides the sole immediate access that we have to beings, while understanding is indirect and must refer to something general in order to return to the particular; and 'this detour (discursiveness), which is essential to the understanding, is the clearest index of its finitude'.[22] In an intuition undetermined by thought something is at least given, whereas a faculty of combining the manifold can signify nothing at all if no manifold has been given. So, because of the irreducibly finite nature of thought, 'all [God's] cognition must be intuition rather than *thought* which always manifests limits'.[23]

If the understanding *could* do without sensible intuition and itself deal immediately with the object, then due to the spontaneous nature of thought, as we have seen, the object that it acts upon and determines would not have been given *to* it from outside – for this could only come about through the senses – but would be freely given by and for itself. However, such an understanding would bear no relation to our discursive faculty:

> For if I were to think of an understanding that itself intuited (as, e.g., a divine understanding that did not present given objects but through whose presentation the objects would at the same time be given or produced), then in regard to such cognition the categories would have no signification

[21] *CPR*, A248/B305.
[22] Heidegger, *KPM*, p. 34.
[23] Kant, *CPR*, B71.

> whatever. The categories are only rules for an understanding whose entire power consists in thought, i.e., in the act of bringing to the unity of apperception the synthesis of the manifold that has, in intuition, been given to it from elsewhere. Hence such an understanding by itself cognises nothing whatever, but only combines and orders the material for cognition, i.e., the intuition which must be given to it by the object.[24]

Because these rules of the understanding are not taken from the senses, however, we are naturally led into the fallacious belief that they are independent from sense and that purely logical reasoning can give us insight into a supersensible world, but once again this could only be the case for an understanding that intuited, for by itself it has no capacity to access objects. Therefore, the grounding condition of sensible intuition, that it is reliant upon already existent objects to be given, is *a fortiori* true for the understanding.

However, the concept of noumena cannot simply be discarded because we find ourselves unable to know anything of it. Since the objects of experience are only appearances, there must be something underlying that appearance, and because it is only for us that the conditions of sensibility hold, then this underlying substrate will not be such as is extended in space nor will it have a temporal duration. Thus the understanding can conceive of this supersensible world but only negatively, that is, by abstracting from the conditions of our sensible intuition. So Kant's doctrine of sensibility does not only leave a space open for the concept of noumena in the negative sense while remaining agnostic, it actually requires it because of the very

[24] Ibid., B145.

fact that appearances are not things in themselves and that our form of intuition cannot be the only possible kind.[25] If, on the other hand, we were to think of noumena in the *positive* sense, i.e., as the '*object of a nonsensible intuition*',[26] we would need to assume an intellect that is capable of accessing this other dimension. This must be a faculty of intuition, because only intuition provides direct access to objects, but since the 'object' here is non-sensible, this intuition must therefore be an intellectual one. The Noumenon then, like intellectual intuition, is a problematic concept, serving only to indicate the boundaries of our finite cognition. If we did not have such a concept then nothing would prevent us from considering our way of intuiting to be absolute, and hence the world of appearances to be the world as it is in itself. So the concept of noumena as limit is essential to the Kantian system. In this way our understanding can venture beyond its proper sphere, but only problematically, and the actual *existence* of this world can in no way be determined by the mere concept. However, indicating the boundaries beyond which our knowledge cannot go still amounts to an extension of knowledge, albeit a negative extension.

[25] We will discuss Hegel's response to this purported necessity of the unknowable thing in itself at a later stage, but it is worth mentioning here the brand of Kantianism espoused by John McDowell in *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), which is informed by what he calls a 'domesticated' Hegelianism. The crux of this novel hybrid can be expressed in the following quote: 'The way to correct what is unsatisfactory in Kant's thinking about the supersensible is rather to embrace the Hegelian image in which the conceptual is unbounded on the outside.' (p. 83.) For McDowell, the only way to explain how conceptual thought can gain a purchase on the external world is to adopt the Kantian thesis that spontaneity is already operative in receptivity, but he does this while jettisoning the 'transcendental framework' (p. 43), so there is no extra-conceptual reality that is given to us in intuition and then acted on by our understanding. He stops short of embracing idealism however, because the assertion that there is no outer boundary to conceptual content is not to say that there is no reality outside of our *thinking* and *judging* activity. All it says is that this external reality taken in by us in experience, as long we are not misled, does not differ from how it is given to us. There are certainly things that we are not sensitive enough to perceive and so escape our knowledge but it would be quite wrong to equate this with a noumenal realm.
[26] Kant, *CPR*, B307.

The concept of a purely intelligible object is an entirely undetermined one because we cannot think of any way in which such an object could be given. Indeed, as Heidegger drew our attention to above, the very concept of a noumenal *object* is self-contradictory. As Kant writes,

> We cannot call the noumenon such an *object*; for this signifies precisely the problematic concept of an object for a quite different intuition and for an understanding quite different from ours – an object that hence is itself a problem. Hence the concept of the noumenon is not the concept of an object; rather, it is the problem, linked inevitably with the limitation of our sensibility, as to whether there may not be objects wholly detached from this sensibility's intuition.[27]

The unknown thing called noumenon is not an *object* since objectivity itself is the result of an act of synthesis performed by our cognitive faculties. For, again, the sense-data that we take in via intuition is not given to us as unified, which can only be an act of our intellect. This synthesis does not apply only to the chronology of our experiences so that one thing follows another or certain things are perceived to take place simultaneously; the very wholeness or consistency of an object is not intuited directly but is a form bestowed upon the manifold. Thus, exactly corresponding to the transcendental unity of apperception touched upon earlier is the concept of the transcendental object. This, likewise, is a purely formal point of unity, or frame, to which we refer the matter of sensation and whose role is to keep our cognitions from 'being determined haphazardly or arbitrarily, [and ensure] that

[27] Ibid., A287-8/B343-4.

they are determined *a priori* in a certain way.'[28] This transcendental object is thus unknowable, but not in the same way that the noumenon is unknowable, i.e., entirely outside of all possible experience and having no relation whatsoever to our faculty of cognition. It is unknowable because, having no content, there is nothing in it *to* know. It is nothing but the concept of an object in general, which as such sits on the limit between the inside and the outside of experience. If it fell on the inside then it would be just another piece of sense-data which itself would then need to be determined according to some other rule of synthesis. If it were outside of experience, like noumena, then it could have no determining influence on our cognition.

The distinction into *mundus sensibilis* and *mundus intelligibilis* assumes our senses and our understanding to refer to two ontologically distinct regions, but as Kant repeatedly reminds us, they can 'determine objects *only in combination*. If we separate them, then we have intuition without concepts, or concepts without intuitions; but in either case we have presentations that we cannot refer to any determinate object.'[29] If our understanding were to think an object, for example, noumena, of which we could have no intuition, and yet we wanted to assert the actual existence of such an object then the existence, along with the thought could only spring from the understanding itself, which for us is impossible, because by understanding alone we can divine only the *possibility* of a thing; for the *actuality* of the object corresponding to this possibility some sensation must be given. It is here that we hit upon another aspect of intellectual intuition, this time from the

[28] Ibid., A104.
[29] Ibid., A258/B314.

Critique of Judgement. For it is only for a mind structured as ours is, into sense and understanding, that there exists such a distinction between possibility and actuality:

> Human understanding cannot avoid the necessity of drawing a distinction between the possibility and the actuality of things. The reason for this lies in our own selves and the nature of our cognitive faculties. For were it not that two entirely heterogeneous factors, the understanding for concepts and sensuous intuition for the corresponding objects, are required for the exercise of these faculties, there would be no such distinction between the possible and the actual. *This means that if our understanding were intuitive it would have no objects but such as are actual*. Concepts, which are merely directed to the possibility of an object, and sensuous intuitions, which give us something and yet do not thereby let us cognise it as an object, would both cease to exist. Now the whole distinction which we draw between the merely possible and the actual rests upon the fact that *possibility signifies the position of the representation of a thing relative to our concept, and, in general, to our capacity of thinking, whereas actuality signifies the positing of the thing in its intrinsic existence apart from this concept*. Accordingly the distinction of possible from actual things is one that is merely valid subjectively for human understanding.[30]

As we can see, since it is only for us that this distinction holds, in the mind of the Supreme Being the actual and the possible would coincide as one, and anything conceived would immediately *be*. To grasp the full import of this passage we must

[30] *CoJ*, §76, AA 401-2. [Italics added.]

turn our attention back to the first *Critique*, in particular, to the 'Postulates of Empirical Thought As Such', the fourth set of synthetic principles of the pure understanding. Here the *possible* is defined as that which '*agrees with the formal conditions of experience'* and the *actual* as that which '*coheres with the material conditions of experience* (with sensation)' [my italics]. The third postulate, that 'that whose coherence with the actual is determined according to universal conditions of experience is *necessary* (exists necessarily)'[31] we shall leave aside. Unlike the first two principles (governing the axioms of intuition and the anticipations of perception), the 'postulates' do not in any way determine the object and are not added to the concept of a thing as a predicate. For as Kant demonstrates in his famous refutation of the ontological proof of God, being or existence is not a real predicate and can in no way be asserted from the mere concept of a thing. No matter how far we explicate our concepts, unless there is some object given to intuition we can know nothing whatsoever about whether this concept corresponds to a real thing. So rather than contributing to the concept or determining the object itself, the postulates express 'only the object's *relation* to the cognitive power',[32] thus whether that object is given to us as possible, i.e., only to the understanding, or as given also to sense and therefore actual.

We can conceive and cognise the possibility of things without the actual existence of the thing coming first, but only by referring to the formal conditions of experience. Although in our mind we could play with all sorts of fanciful forms and ideas, when it comes to considering the *real* possibility of the thing it must conform to the conditions of a possible experience. So the range of possibilities is already

[31] *CPR*, A218/B265-6.
[32] Ibid., A219/B266. [My emphasis.]

strictly determined in advance according to insuperable limits. Typically the scope of the possible is held to be infinitely wider than that of the actual and to extend to encompass anything that can be conceived so long as it obeys the principle of non-contradiction, such as Leibniz's possible worlds. However, in this case, when their possibility rests under conditions that are themselves only possible, such entities are not possible '*in every respect*.'[33] The latter is mere logical possibility and can lead to all sorts of rich speculation but no knowledge. When it comes to *real* possibility experience is the only guide. So nothing can be *added* to the possible, its limits are strictly determined by the conditions of experience and anything that lies outside of those limits is *im*possible. All that can be added to is our *understanding* of what is possible. Surely, however, we must assume that although the possible and the actual do not belong to *metaphysically* different realms and are subject to the same conditions, there must be a fundamental *ontological* difference in status – the type of being belonging to the 'object' in each case. This type of being, however, depends entirely upon its relation to our cognition. As Kant puts it,

> Through the actuality of a thing I do indeed posit more than the possibility of it, but not in the thing; for the thing can never contain more in its actuality than what was contained in its complete possibility. Rather, while the thing's possibility was merely a positing of the thing in reference to the understanding (to understanding's empirical use), actuality is at the same time a connection of the thing with perception.[34]

[33] Ibid., A232/B284.
[34] Ibid., A235n/B287n.

So once again, on the side of the thing itself, and hence in reality, actuality and possibility are entirely indifferent. They merely signify whether an actual perception accompanies the thought of the thing in the subject. If I am thinking of an imaginary oak tree and then I encounter a real oak tree, the former's being-possible and the latter's being-actual do not tell us anything at all about the thing concerned, about *what* it is. All it tells us is *how* the thing is related to our cognitive faculties. So possibility signifies something 'inside' us while actuality must refer to something 'outside' us, and we have already seen that this cannot be the case for the supreme being which is not *given* but *gives* its objects. For us what is actual is entirely contingent and outside of our powers to determine, which is of course the essence of our finitude. With this in mind, if we were able via technological advancements to freely create actuality from mere possibility, as appears to be the case, then surely what Žižek says hits the mark and for us too this distinction could be negotiated at will. We could not destroy it altogether because it corresponds to the unalterable structure of our cognition, but we could at least master it. However, the realm of possibility is only seemingly more under our power than that of actuality; it too is marked by finitude even though our knowledge of it does not rely on the empirical. Limits are set to the possible, and all we can do is bring our understanding to determine these limits; we cannot freely change them through the power of speculation, or get 'behind' them and give an account of them ('why the categories?' 'why space and time?'). So when the distinction between possibility and actuality is as modest as it is in Kant, the ability to traverse it at will is not a supreme power. These pre-given limits conditioning the possible in advance already thwart our attempts to overcome finitude.

The actual in experience must agree with the *form* of possible experience in general, and this form can be known *a priori* but not the matter, which is always *a posteriori*. But one of the fundamental doctrines of pre-critical metaphysics is that matter must precede form, that is, the components must precede their arrangement. This, Kant argues, is because there is an assumption that the understanding has a direct insight into being, unconstrained by the conditions of sensuous intuition. Therefore, since the understanding requires for something first to have been given in order to then determine it, in this account unbounded, absolute reality is first given as the ground of all possibility, which is subsequently determined by limitations – space and time. 'And thus it would in fact have to be, if pure understanding could be referred directly to objects'.[35] Since this is not the case and we have knowledge only of appearances – which must conform to the conditions of sensuous intuition (space and time) – then the form must precede the matter, which is unthinkable for the 'intellectualist philosopher'. Limitation does not come *after* to determine a given infinite substance, but is irreducible and is in fact the condition of the possibility of experience. This sheds further light on our questions above concerning the impossibility of accounting for the emergence of the finite out of the infinite. In Kant everything starts with finitude but finitude cannot be absolute, so the realm of the noumenal thing-in-itself is posited as a necessary correlate of the thing-as-appearance. There is not originally the thing in itself, generated through the infinite intellectual intuition of the Supreme Being, which is subsequently limited in space and time when perceived by human intuition, because this would collapse the two heterogeneous aspects into one and treat our sensuous perspective as if it were merely a confused intellectual intuition. If finitude comes first,

[35] Ibid., A267/B323.

however, and God is only posited out of the necessity of stabilising our phenomenal world of appearance, then once again we, as finite beings, in a strange reversal, seem to be placed *above* the infinite being.

The Imagination and the Schematism

As Heidegger remarks, in the course of the elaboration of the distinction between possibility and actuality, 'it turned out that the positing of the actual proceeds out of the bare concept of the possible, out into the outside, over against the inside of the subjective condition of the subject.'[36] Because the conditions of possibility stem from *our* cognitive faculties, we project the form in advance to which the actual must conform in order to confront us as outside of us. This horizon, through which alone beings are able to be encountered, is the guiding theme of Heidegger's early work. In his so-called '*Kantbuch*' from 1929, this takes the form of a radical, and in some quarters highly contentious, phenomenological interpretation of the transcendental imagination.

The imagination is defined by Kant in the second edition of the *Critique* as 'the power of presenting an object in intuition even *without the object's being present*.'[37] It is the first act of synthesis performed by the mind, which brings the sensible manifold together as an image. This combination thus given is called by Kant *apprehension*, but apprehension is not yet knowledge, for this we require *comprehension* which the understanding provides. So the synthesis of imagination acts as a mediating faculty, falling between sensibility and understanding and

[36] Heidegger, 'Kant's Thesis About Being', trans. Ted E. Klein Jr. and William E. Pohl, in *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 358.
[37] *CPR*, B151.

enabling the latter to perform its conceptual operations. Before the understanding can act upon the given and bring it to unity, the prior synthesis of imagination must have taken place. There is, however, some confusion over the peculiar status of the imagination and whether or not it is to be positioned alongside sense and understanding as one of the fundamental faculties, or indeed even as *the* fundamental faculty as Heidegger asserts. But the first line of the Transcendental Logic could not be more clear:

> Our cognition arises from *two* basic sources of the mind. The first is our ability to receive presentations (and is our receptivity for impression); the second is our ability to cognise an object though these presentations (and is the spontaneity of concepts).[38]

In the first edition version of the Transition to the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories, however, Kant writes,

> [There] are *three* [my italics] original sources (capacities or powers of the soul) that contain the conditions for the possibility of all experience, and that cannot themselves be derived from any other power of the mind: viz., sense, imagination, and apperception. On them are based (1) the *a priori synopsis* of the manifold through sense; (2) the *synthesis* of this manifold through imagination; and finally, (3) the *unity* of this synthesis through original apperception.[39]

[38] Ibid., A50/B74. [Emphasis added.]
[39] Ibid., A94.

This apparent inconsistency is underscored by the imagination's 'homelessness', as Heidegger puts it, since the division of the doctrine of elements into Aesthetic and Logic corresponds only to the two primary faculties. The reason for this is that the imagination does not seem to be a separate source of knowledge whose elements and contribution to cognition can be examined in isolation, like sensibility and understanding can, but it performs an indispensable function that neither can do in its place. It is both receptive and spontaneous, performing a figurative rather than conceptual act of synthesis.

Kant names two distinct functions of the imagination, to which he gives the names *reproductive* and *productive* imagination. The operation performed by the reproductive imagination is that which allows the mind to recall a previously given content. This is not just the power of long-term memory, of bringing something back to mind that occurred in the recent or distant past, but is actually responsible for the consistency of the time series. Without the reproductive imagination to hold onto what has been given each new moment would wipe away the last and there would be no experience, just, perhaps, a constant feeling of surprise that we exist. This power of holding and retaining is essential for experience, but since it is entirely subject to empirical laws there can be no *a priori* act of reproduction. The *productive* imagination, however, differs from the reproductive in that it freely and originally gives form to the content received from intuition. Like the categories of the understanding, the form thus bestowed is not taken from experience, precisely because there is no form to be so given until it has performed its function; hence it is spontaneous. However, because it deals directly with the matter of intuition, rather than indirectly via concepts, it is simultaneously receptive. This aspect-

giving is not a subsequent act of assembly that is performed only once the disordered raw materials have been given, it gives this form *in advance* so that the manifold conforms as it is given. So we might say that the reproductive imagination's power of retention is the enabling source of the past, while the productive imagination projects in advance out of the future, and it is only through their joint holding-projecting (or retention and protention in the language of Husserl) that we can experience the consistency of the present.

Because this productive power of the imagination, unlike the reproductive imagination, is not reliant on empirical laws for its operation, it is able to produce images that have not been taken from experience. In his *Anthropology* Kant describes it as 'a faculty of the original representation of the object (*exhibitio originaria*), which consequently precedes experience',[40] but as Heidegger puts it,

> This original presentation, however, is not as 'creative' as *intuitus originarius* [original intuition], which creates the essent in the act of intuiting it. The productive imagination only forms the aspect of a possible object, which last under certain conditions may be realisable, i.e., capable of being made present. *This realisation, however, is never accomplished by the imagination itself*.[41]

However, what if we were to be in possession of an ability or mechanism which actually *did* allow the imagination itself to accomplish this realisation? We are referring, of course, to the brain-computer interface and cognitive imaging systems

[40] *Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View*, AA 167.
[41] Heidegger, *KPM*, p. 137. [Italics added.]

we discussed in our previous chapter and which Žižek claims grant the user the faculty of intellectual intuition. If the only difference between the *original exhibition* of the productive imagination and the *original intuition* of the divine intellect is the former's confinement to playing with forms of possible objects and its inability, unlike the latter, to bring about the presence of the actual object in reality then we are indeed faced with the possibility of a new faculty of the mind which could at least be *likened* to intellectual intuition, and Žižek's seemingly extravagant claim is closer to the truth than it first seemed. But exactly how productive is the productive imagination, and is it *completely* independent from the receptivity (hence finitude) of our sensible intuition?

What is at issue here is our ability to bring about something wholly new, and whether there is a resource in the mind that is not dependent upon given material. Faith in such an ability is what leads artists, writers and musicians to experiment with 'mind expanding' hallucinogenic drugs. This is a question of whether the products of our deepest, wildest imagination, if plucked straight from the mind and given substantial existence, would amount to a *creatio ex nihilo*. However, in the very next paragraph of the *Anthropology*, just after Kant has outlined the powers of the productive imagination and its independence from experience, he immediately limits its scope, insisting that '[the] productive faculty, however, is nonetheless not creative, because it does not have the power to produce a sense impression which has never before occurred to our senses. One can always identify the material which gave rise to that impression.'[42] So the productivity of the imagination only amounts to a reorganisation of sensibly given material. To take a concrete example, the

[42] Kant, *Anthropology*, AA 167-8.

music created through the BCI that we discussed at length in the previous chapter will always be operating within a pre-given musical language that is simply being triggered by the mind rather than physically played. Even if it were to so radically shake up that language that it sounded to listeners as if it were an entirely new vocabulary – like Schoenberg's twelve-tone serialism for instance – thought does not by itself and out of nothing give 'the existence of its object' as the faculty of intellectual intuition was characterised as doing. This is why even the most inventive piece of science fiction is always on some level recognisable and familiar and cannot escape earthly concerns, introducing creatures or intelligences that are identifiably of our world. How many times have we seen aliens in film or on television portrayed as insect-like, fish-like, reptilian, or simply human-like with distorted or exaggerated features (*a la* Star Trek.) Kant himself uses the example of artistic renderings of Gods and angels which always appear in human form because we simply cannot imagine any other form for a rational being to take. Of course, this is not a melancholy diagnosis, and is not intended to deny or downgrade originality, but only to assert that originality is strictly finite and limited to producing new combinations, and is not capable of *creation* in the sense that we would ascribe to the divine intellect. Indeed this is nothing more than saying that the poet does not with every new poem invent an entirely new vocabulary from nothing but must work within the constraints of language, and the production of something new and unfamiliar out of the familiar is exactly what originality is. As we saw with Kant's account of aesthetic ideas, the artist of genius can take this sensibly given material and create images which cause the mind to transcend the sensible, but she cannot present such suprasensible ideas *directly*.

This inability of ours to create out of nothing is not only a subjective limitation, it is also an ontological condition, for the very consistency of experience rests on there being no rupture in the time-order. In the Analogies of Experience, the third set of synthetic principles of the pure understanding, Kant lays out the rules for connecting and unifying the objects of intuition in order to allow for empirical experience. As noted above, if we are to experience change or succession, Kant insists that we must employ the concept of substance as the constant permanence underlying all change. Therefore all change is to be regarded only as the modification of permanent substance. If this were not the case then every change we experienced would be a pure arising and passing away and there would be no way of connecting the thing that arises to the thing that passes away. A melting block of ice would be experienced as the simultaneous disappearance of ice and appearance of water, rather than the changing state of one and the same thing. This is not to say that the ice and water are made up of a permanent substance that endures throughout all its changes of state, but that it is only because *something* endures in all variation that any change can be experienced as such. In fact it is only through the permanent that time itself can be experienced, because time has no succession, only things that are *in* time succeed one another. If everything was in constant flux and there were no permanent substrate with which to determine the time series, then there could be no experience. So if something were to arise out from nothing then there would have to have been a point of time in which it was not, but as Kant says, 'to what will you fasten this point of time, if not to what is already there?'[43] It would make no sense to speak of an empty time because this could not be an object of experience, or of a *different* time because for this different

[43] *CPR*, A188/B231.

time stream to have any influence on our time it must connect to it in a relation of succession and thus annul itself. Thus if the arising is tied to things that existed beforehand and that endure up to the arising itself, then 'this something that arises was only a determination of what, as the permanent, was beforehand.'[44]

The inevitable problem Kant must deal with now is how I am to distinguish the *subjective* succession of my apprehension from the *objective* succession of objects. When reading a book I apprehend the words and sentences as following on from one another, while in fact this is only the succession of my attention, the words themselves of course existing simultaneously. While watching a train go by, on the other hand, I also experience it in succession, however here the succession is in the object itself. On Kant's account, the only way for me to distinguish real succession from subjective succession is by reference to necessary laws that are irreversible, and this is the law of cause and effect. My reading one word after another does not alter anything in the object and the order could just as easily be reversed or changed. In my apprehension of the moving train, on the other hand, its position at one end of the track is followed by its position further down *necessarily* and could not have been taken to occur in a different order. So the very possibility of objective experience rests on the necessity of cause and effect, and this precludes any new event or emergence from occurring without there being a discoverable cause:

> Hence arising is only change, and not origination from nothing. For if this origination from nothing is regarded as effect of an extraneous cause, then it

[44] Ibid.

> is called creation; and creation cannot be admitted as an event among appearances, because its very possibility would already annul the unity of experience.[45]

We will discuss what this entails for our power of free-will at a later stage.

So far we have been dealing primarily with the empirical use of the productive imagination, in keeping with Kant's procedure in the *Anthropology*, but there is also a transcendental use, which comes to light in the short section of the *Critique* called 'On the Schematism of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding' – according to Heidegger the key section of the whole of the *Critique* – where its character as receptive-spontaneous and its position as the central point of unity between sensibility and understanding is confirmed.

The schematism deals with the simple-sounding problem of how a concept is to refer to an object, which is the question of how something entirely general can apply to something particular. For this to happen the two factors must be homogeneous, meaning the concept must 'contain what is presented in the object that is to be subsumed under it.'[46] By way of illustration, Kant cites the homogeneity between the empirical concept of a plate and the geometrical concept of a circle, 'inasmuch as the roundness thought in the concept of the plate can be intuited [also] in the circle.'[47] However, Kant reaches a problem when it comes to the *pure* concepts (categories) of the understanding, because nothing in the mere concept of causality, as the relation of ground to consequent, tells us anything at all

[45] Ibid., A206/B251.
[46] Ibid., A137/B176.
[47] Ibid.

about objects of experience and so its application to experience seems unsubstantiated. In Heidegger's terms this is the problem of the unity of ontological knowledge: how pure sensibility is to be joined to pure understanding to form a whole. Kant's solution is to locate a third element that is homogeneous with both the category and the appearance, being at once intellectual and sensible, that can act as mediator between them. This is named as the transcendental *schema*, and it is a product of the pure imagination.

The schema is the *a priori* condition of sensibility of the concepts of the understanding, the restricting condition under which alone it can apply to objects, and the *schematism* is the procedure of the sensibilisation of these concepts. So the schema is produced by the imagination and employed by the understanding in order to apply its concepts. Above we outlined the way the imagination forms an image out of the sensible manifold of intuition, but the schema is not a simple image. Rather, it is the 'universal *procedure* of the imagination for providing a concept with its image'.[48] Kant's example is that no *image* of a triangle could ever reach the *concept* of triangle as such, for it would only be a particular instance that could not extend to cover all possible images of a closed three sided geometric figure. So the schema of the triangle exists only in thought and never *in concreto*, and acts as the rule or guide governing the application of the concept of triangle. The same applies to an empirical concept, for (to again take Kant's example) no particular dog we could encounter in experience could adequately attain to the mere concept of dog. But this schema of the concept 'dog' is not a generalisation of every possible breed of dog mangled together into one monstrous hybrid; in fact it is not an image at all,

[48] Ibid., A140/B179-80. [Italics added.]

but rather *allows* for the image of a dog corresponding to the concept to be formed and for an actual dog to be identified as such.

When it comes to the categories there can be no image at all, for how could one form an image of possibility or impossibility, or reality and negation? Since the sensibilisation of the categories could only be pure, the key to their schematism must be sought in the *pure* form of sensibility. This pure form of sensibility is time, which Kant holds to be more essential than space because all objects spatially intuited must also be temporal, whereas the reverse is not true. This is not to say that space can be reduced to time but only that the latter encompasses the former and is thus the most basic. Hence, the transcendental schemata are defined as '*a priori time determinations* according to rules'.[49] The only way the pure concept of substance can be applied is by the schema, which is the 'permanence of the real in time'.[50] Likewise, the schema of reality and negation are given as either filled or empty time, and so on. So if we were to start with the two heterogeneous poles of pure apperception and pure sensibility (time), with no intermediary, there is no conceivable way of bringing them together into a unified whole. Time, by itself as pure intuition, is completely undetermined and unrelated to the categories, which in turn, taken alone are purely abstract and have no application to time. The transcendental schemata allow for time to be brought to unity and thus determined for thought, and on the side of the thought it enables the application of the categories and thus gives them content. For the concept of substance, by itself, signifies nothing and has no relation to an object; only by the relation to time can it have any content at all. Unschematised concepts signify nothing, but undetermined

[49] Ibid., A145/B184.
[50] Ibid., A144/B183.

intuition is likewise nothing for us, so in forming the schemata the imagination provides an indispensable role. Thus it is not the case that we need *only* intuition and thought in order to possess knowledge, for this only gives us the bare bones and fails to account for their unity. Only the schemata can complete the picture and allow for both sides to correspond, but it is a particularly slippery operation that it performs. As Sebastian Gardner observes, 'it is not just that we can say relatively less about schemata than we can about intuitions and concepts, and that we cannot identify their ultimate source', for as we have already seen, we are likewise necessarily ignorant of the source of the categories of the understanding and the forms of intuition. Rather, transcendental schemata 'remain in a *special* sense hard to grasp, because they are required to combine in themselves two kinds of property, or representational functions, the seeming immiscibility of which is precisely what made us introduce them in the first place.'[51]

As Gardner asks, is the schema a *thought about time* or *time thought about in a certain way*? The answer is that it is both and neither at the same time, because as soon as it becomes one or the other it loses its function as mediator, but the only way it can be thought at all is by assimilating it to one side or the other. It therefore vanishes as soon as we try to grasp it.

We can see from this and the earlier considerations why the imagination plays so key a role in Heidegger's interpretation of Kant, and why the schematism is of such pivotal importance. Heidegger reads the *Critique of Pure Reason* as oriented toward

[51] Sebastian Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999) p. 170.

a 'laying of the foundation of metaphysics',[52] that is, an investigation into the very possibility of metaphysical inquiry, which necessarily leads to a disclosure of the primordial ground from which it springs. Kant's investigation into the possibility of *a priori* synthetic judgements, starting with the pure forms of sensibility and understanding and going on to their unity, Heidegger takes as treating of the possibility of ontological knowledge, which latter makes empirical knowledge possible. In Heidegger's terms this concerns the *passing beyond* (transcending) given beings to the horizon upon which these beings can originally come to be. Thus Kant's project is violently grafted onto Heidegger's own in a virtuoso interpretation that enacts the point at which scrupulously close reading turns into radical reinvention.

Ontological Knowledge: Heidegger and the Transcendental Imagination

Heidegger begins his analysis with a radical insistence on receptivity, the true import of which is said to be missed by interpreters who treat mainly of the role of logic in Kant and ignore the central position of the transcendental aesthetic, and hence the primary status of intuition. However, before something can announce itself to us in this act of receptivity there must be a precursory act of orientation, which lets the beings thus given *be*, and be revealed:

> In this primordial act of orientation, the finite being first pro-poses to itself a free-space within which something can 'correspond' to it. To hold oneself in advance in such a free-space and to form it originally is nothing other than

[52] Heidegger, *KPM*, p. 3.

> transcendence which marks all finite comportment with regard to the essent.[53]

So there must be some prior act which takes place *before* we can be faced with any being which our intuition can receive or our understanding act upon. We must have projected in advance the horizon upon which this encounter can take place. This horizon is nothing less than knowledge – or more accurately 'pre-comprehension' – of being. This knowledge of being acts as a 'clearing' that allows us to set beings before ourselves, for before anything can confront us as what or how it is we must first have the implicit (non-thematic) knowledge *that* something is. This always-already disclosed / disclosing opening of being and its covering-over in the history of western philosophy (i.e. metaphysics), is of course the driving problem behind Heidegger's entire philosophical project.

In this ontological knowledge we do not direct ourselves toward *beings* because it is only through this knowledge that beings are enabled to be. It must pass beyond beings to their horizon, but from the perspective of beings this thing we are directed towards can only be called a *nothing*, because it is not a being. Being 'is' not, that is being cannot *be*, otherwise it would no longer be being but would be *a* being, an entity. But in spite of this it is still in some sense given (given as the *giving* itself), and this opening must be 'kept in view'[54] but cannot be intuited as such. In Heidegger's Kant interpretation this is where the transcendental object comes in, that unknowable X which acts as the 'terminus of the precursory orientation'.[55] It cannot be perceived as an object precisely because it is the horizon of objectivity

[53] Ibid., p. 75.
[54] Ibid., p. 127.
[55] Ibid,. p. 126.

itself. So since it will never be encountered as a being it is nothing, but the nothing out of which beings unfold.

Ontological knowledge, then, forms transcendence: '[this] totality composed of pure intuition and pure understanding, united in advance, "constitutes" the free-space within which all essents can be encountered.'[56] Because of the central place occupied by the transcendental imagination in this unity, as demonstrated by the mediating act it performs in the 'A Deduction' and its role in the schematism, imagination becomes the foundation on which the possibility of ontological knowledge is founded, and hence the possibility of transcendence. In fact, for Heidegger, the imagination is not only the unifying central faculty but is actually the *root source* of sensibility and understanding and the ground from which they emerge. The free, aspect-forming role of the imagination, characterised above, is the projection of the horizon of transcendence and is necessarily prior to receptive intuition and spontaneous thought, allowing them to be what they are. From this we then learn that in themselves pure intuition and pure understanding *are* imagination, which does not mean that they are only imagined or dreamed up, but that its formative act makes their functions possible.

Let us try to explicate this bold claim and understand it a little better. Pure intuition, as pure, does not receive something present, because it must be *prior* to all empirical intuition. Since its pure form, time, is nothing outside of the subject, but rather enables these beings outside the subject to be intuited, it is in fact *given* by

[56] Ibid., p. 81.

pure intuition. It 'furnishes an aspect'[57] in advance of experience, hence pure receptivity *in itself* is pure spontaneity: the *giving* which allows that which *is given* to be received. What the mind intuits in pure intuition is actually its own activity, so pure intuition is pure auto-affection, but since this intuition by itself could only ever intuit 'the actual *now*, but never the *now*-sequence as such'[58], and because the 'actual now' is an abstract fiction, it actually intuits nothing at all without the prior synthesis of the imagination which presents time as pure arising and passing away. This can be confirmed by reference to the schematism, because the 'actual now' as opposed the 'now sequence' would be the *undetermined* intuition of time. It is only through the schemata that we are able to, as Kant puts it, intuit 'the *time series*, the *time content*, the *time order*, and finally the *time sum total*.'[59]

In a similar move, the pure understanding, characterised by Kant of course as spontaneity, is shown 'in itself' to be pure receptivity. The rules of connection which the understanding employs are not 'apprehended as actually given "in consciousness"' but only manifest themselves in the act of their application, when they 'compel as they connect.'[60] The understanding gives this order and unity to experience in and through its very submission to it, hence it is only through *reception* that it is capable of the act of synthesis. So just as the 'spontaneity' at the root of pure intuition is what enables its receptivity, here the reverse is true and spontaneity implies 'placing oneself under a necessity which is self-imposed'.[61]

[57] Ibid., p. 108.
[58] Ibid., p. 179.
[59] Kant, *CPR*, A145/B184-5.
[60] Heidegger, *KPM*, p. 161.
[61] Ibid., p. 161-2.

In this way, pure intuition, as spontaneous receptivity and pure thought as receptive spontaneity are reduced to functions of the transcendental imagination. Both are characterised as self-giving, as forming that which it is able receive, whether through the auto-affection of time or the self-imposition of rules.

But is it legitimate to characterise pure intuition as self-giving spontaneity, and does this not in fact misrepresent the specific character of sensibility? If this act is originary and prior to receptivity does this mean that the latter is derivative and that on a more primordial level our finitude is overcome? After all, the very mark of human finitude for Kant is that, unlike the divine mind, ours is irreducibly split into sensibility and understanding. So does not treating these poles as two stems from a common root and tracing this back to a site of original unity – imagination – lead Heidegger to lose sight of what was in fact one of his key insights: the receptivity, and hence finitude at the core of our being? As the philosopher Heinrich Levy remarked in an early review of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*,

> Has not finite pure intuition and finite pure understanding herewith obtained the structure of the Kantian *infinite intellectual intuition* and the *infinite intuitive understanding* – and indeed as completely as possible? Has not Heidegger thereby established even that his interpretation – and thereby his philosophy to which this interpretation leads – is more related to German Idealism than to Kantian criticism, despite the fact that he believes it moves in a contrary direction to German Idealism?[62]

[62] Cited in Martin Weatherston, *Heidegger's Interpretation of Kant*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) p. 175.

While there is a grain of truth here – and Heidegger has often been said to be much closer to absolute idealism than he himself believed – such a criticism misses the point, because Heidegger is constantly at pains not to allow the spontaneity of transcendental imagination to be confused with the creation of an intuitive intellect. The aspect-forming act of transcendence is, says Heidegger, *ontologically* creative but not *ontically* creative, so the question must be asked whether this 'overcomes the finitude of transcendence or whether, on the contrary, it immerses the finite "subject" in the finitude proper to it.'[63] It is expressly *because* we are finite beings thrown into the midst of beings that we must be capable of holding open this horizon of transcendence. This latter is by no means an originary cry of 'let there be light!' which directly leads to the existence of those beings that surround us and simultaneously allows us to encounter them. Creativity on the ontological level does not mean that we actually create being itself, because this is quite clearly beyond the capacity of a finite subject. Rather it means, once again, that it furnishes to itself the horizon within which beings reveal themselves to it, but that those beings thus revealed are outside of its power and in themselves indifferent to its knowing them. So understanding of being and this horizon of transcendence is finitude itself, necessitated because we are *not* capable of intellectual intuition and do not have beings under our power. But, for Heidegger, this cannot be an absolutised finitude, for the philosophy of finitude must itself be finite and never claim to have arrived at the 'final truth' of finitude. Thus his response to the question 'why finitude' would be to say that if we could answer this question we would not be finite beings.

[63] Heidegger, *KPM*, p. 128.

Kant is keen to ground finitude on the steady dual foundations of intuition and thought, and even though we cannot inquire into the *origin* of these foundations we can at least thoroughly delineate their properties and know that nothing is prior to them. Heidegger, however, by reducing these to branches of the transcendental imagination is by no means endeavouring to excavate a more primordial but no less steady ground. Rather, he intends precisely to de-stabilise the ground itself, for the imagination is not a solid ground but an abyssal *non-ground* which nevertheless *grounds*. At once spontaneous and receptive, it springs out of itself and so is founded on nothing. Heidegger accounts for the reduced role the transcendental imagination plays in the second edition of the *Critique* as Kant's recoil from the abyss that he had uncovered. In regressing to this groundless ground, however, this does not mean that we have surpassed our finitude and thus accounted for it. The spontaneity at the source of our receptivity does not amount to a free creation of oneself, or the total mastery over our being. For as Heidegger puts it in a typically elliptical remark in *Being and Time*, 'Dasein is not itself the *ground of its being*, because the ground first arises from its own project, but as a self, it is the *being of its ground*.'[64] In being its ground, *Dasein* understands its situation as thrown and grasps the possibilities that arise from this thrownness and takes them up as its own, or takes responsibility for it. It is not the *ground of its being*, however, for the very reason that it is thrown and not self-created, and does not give itself to itself.

For Heidegger, of course, *Dasein* does not 'have' possibilities as something like the property or possession of a self, something that the already existing I-self can *do* or *be*; rather *Dasein is* its possibilities. The way I relate to and understand myself is

[64] *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 1996) p. 262 (285.) Page Numbers in brackets refer to the original German edition.

not as some static being but as *possibilities* of myself, what I will be and what I can be, thus '[Dasein] is existentially that which it is *not yet* in its potentiality of being.'[65] Existence (or Ek-sistence), in Heidegger's terminology means being ahead of oneself, projecting upon one's potentiality of being, but these possibilities are not limitless, in fact they are conditioned by the very withdrawal of other possibilities, as we shall see. This is due to the structure of what in *Being and Time* is called *Care*: the ontological being of *Dasein* as thrown-project.

As finite beings, we are thrown in the midst of beings that are not of our making, nor of our choosing. But the very process through which we find ourselves thus thrown is in the self-projection of possibilities. Only in *surpassing* the beings which surround me do I first find myself among and 'absorbed' by such beings. '*Transcendence means projection of world in such a way that those beings that are surpassed also already pervade and attune that which projects*'.[66] The way we initially encounter things is through using them *for* something: I discover a chair not in studying its properties but in using it *for* relaxation, work, etc. It is not the case that the true being of the things around us is obscured by familiarity and that only by making it alien and unfamiliar do I truly discover what it is, rather the reverse is true. If I were to approach the chair as a piece of design or craftsmanship then I would completely miss what it 'is', as something handy and useful. What Heidegger calls 'world' is the totality of *significance* that such 'innerworldly' beings (e.g. the chair) refer to, their 'what-for' and 'in order to…', that forms a chain of reference. The world thus projected is anchored or grounded in a 'for-the-sake-of-which' that is of course *Dasein* itself. The referential chain orbits around

[65] Ibid. p. 136 (145.)
[66] Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Ground', trans. William McNeill, in *Pathmarks*, p. 128.

and returns to the being that projects: this thing is for that purpose, which in turn is for another purpose, and so on, and it all refers back to *Dasein* as that 'for the sake of which' it all is. This is obviously a brutally crude summary that does not approach the elegance and complexity of Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world, and the 'worldliness of the world', but it is sufficient for our present purposes, which was only to understand the statement that beings are first encountered through transcending them. I am not just one being among others and do not exist *alongside* the chair that I sit in. In using such beings through world-projection, which is for the sake of my own possibilities, I surpass them, and only thus do I ground myself in the midst of beings.

This is what is meant by *Care* as thrown-project; in projecting upon future possibilities I discover myself *as thrown*, and only through being so thrown am I free to project upon these possibilities of myself. Both elements are 'equi-primordial' structural factors that cannot be separated from one another, meaning that I do not first find myself among beings and then subsequently carve out possibilities for myself, nor do I start out from a state of unconditional freedom which is then limited by my factical surroundings. So in 'being-ahead-of-oneself' *Dasein* is co-constituted as *being-already-in* (the world) and *being-together-with* (innerworldly beings), and again this forms a whole rather than individual moments that jostle and restrict one another. From this it follows that freedom is constituted by a twofold *unfreedom*, firstly through *Dasein*'s inability to get behind its ground and secondly through the fact that taking on possibilities of being is simultaneously the *turning away from* other possibilities. Whatever I choose is marked and conditioned by those choices that I did not take and was unable to take. To spell out

this unfreedom more clearly: I did not choose the factical situation into which I was thrown and out of which I project possibilities of being, I do not have power over facticity because then it would no longer be facticity. This provides the condition of these projected possibilities through at the same time *precluding other possibilities* that would have been open were I to have found myself in another set of historical, geographical surroundings etc. So before any choice has even been made, those choices are necessarily limited. Then, in every choice that I do make, other openings are closed off; every decision is what it is only through the choices that I did not take, even if these 'other possibilities' were not apparent to me. Thus *Care*, the ontological constitution of *Dasein*, means being the '(null) ground of a nullity.'[67]

In the essay 'On the Essence of Ground' Heidegger puts it thus:

> The ready possession of possibilities belongs to Dasein, however, because, as projective, it finds itself in the midst of beings. Certain other possibilities are thereby already *withdrawn* from Dasein, and indeed merely through its own facticity. Yet precisely this *withdrawal* of certain possibilities pertaining to its potentiality for being-in-the-world – a withdrawal entailed in its being absorbed by beings – first brings those possibilities of world-projection that can 'actually' be seized upon *toward* Dasein as its world […] *transcendence at once exceeds and withdraws*. The fact that the ever-excessive projection of world attains its power and becomes our possession

[67] *Being and Time*, p. 263 (285.)

> only in such withdrawal is at the same time a transcendental testimony to the *finitude* of Dasein's freedom.[68]

Transcendence *exceeds* in that being ahead of ourselves we are always more than what we are – in being I exceed myself – but it *withdraws* because my freedom is permeated with nullity. This is not an external limitation on our freedom but belongs *internally* to its structure, so that possibilities are only possibilities because they are always preceded by and accompanied by the withdrawal of other possibilities. This is exactly what finite freedom is for Heidegger, and infinite freedom would not be freedom at all. A pure space of 'infinite possibility' would therefore pass over into its opposite and be a space of *no* possibility, or *im*possibility. Sartre, following Heidegger, asserts that a freedom which did not face 'resistance' or 'obstacles' is inconceivable and contradictory. If the 'ends' or 'possibles' which I project were immediately realised, 'if it were sufficient to hope in order to obtain',[69] then my very subjectivity and sense of self would be at stake. For if, as we have seen, it is out of my future projections that I know and am conscious of myself, then were these projected possibles to become automatically fulfilled, 'no project of myself would be possible since it would be enough to conceive of it in order to realise it. Consequently my being-for-myself would be annihilated in the indistinction of present and future.'[70] So 'once the distinction between the simple *wish*, the *representation* which I could choose, and the *choice* is abolished, freedom disappears too.'[71]

[68] 'On the Essence of Ground', p. 128-9.
[69] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 351.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., p. 504. We will return to this theme concerning the impact on subjectivity of having every wish instantly realised in our following chapter.

This brings us to the third point of the citation from Žižek that we started with, namely that closing the 'gap of finitude' would deprive us of our freedom. For Heidegger, the pre-eminent thinker of finitude, we can see that this is clearly the case but we have yet to show why and how it is also the case for Kant, such that anything approaching intellectual intuition in a finite being would lead to the loss of that being's spontaneity.

Kant, Žižek and the Problem of Freedom

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the question of freedom is approached from the problem of accounting for how, out of the binding necessity of natural laws anything like a free act can occur that would not be capable of being traced back to a preceding cause. After all, we saw above how the consistency of experience rests on the necessary continuity of the laws of nature and hence the impossibility of something arising out of nothing. This theme is taken up in the third of the Antinomies of Pure Reason, the dialectical conflicts that reason is led into when it ventures beyond its proper domain. Each antinomy is made up of a thesis and an antithesis, both of which being equally plausible but mutually exclusive metaphysical claims about, respectively, (1) the origin of the world/cosmos and whether or not it had a beginning, (2) the divisibility of matter and whether or not it is made up of simple parts, (3) the laws of nature and whether or not there can be such a thing as a free cause, and (4) the existence or otherwise of an absolutely necessary being. The thesis of the third antinomy states that we must assume a free cause to co-exist alongside the laws of nature in order to account for *causality* itself. If nothing occurs without there being a prior cause then the very existence of

the causal chain, which is after all an occurrence, must likewise be grounded. This latter obviously cannot fall within that chain without simply becoming a part of it, so it must be outside it and hence free. The antithesis on the other hand asserts that freedom is incompatible with natural laws and cannot be incorporated without either destroying those laws or conjoining with them and losing its status as freedom. The notion of a free cause is therefore impossible.

As with all of the antinomies, the two competing positions appear at first sight to exhaust all of the possible alternatives: either freedom exists or it does not. But Kant's solution in each case is to dissolve the conflict by demonstrating that it rests on a transcendental illusion, which only persists as long as appearances are regarded as things in themselves. While the first two antinomies are resolved by both the thesis and antithesis being declared false, in this case both are shown to be *true* because the ontological region to which each refers is heterogeneous. What Kant suggests is that the thesis is true of the things in themselves while the antithesis is true of appearances. In the world of sense we can never happen upon a free cause because every temporal event succeeds a prior state upon which it is consequent and no matter how far we trace back in the series of conditions we will never discover an unconditioned. However, as we saw, the relation of cause and effect is necessary only for *experience*, not absolutely. The things in themselves, as extra-temporal, are not subject to this condition, so they can only be considered as the free, unconditioned *cause* of appearance as such. So for Kant one and the same event viewed now under the sensuous aspect and now under the intelligible could be *both* naturally conditioned and free. As regards the event as appearance, it is conditioned by what preceded it in time, but as regards the very same event on the

side of the thing in itself, it is free. Thus only transcendental idealism can account for freedom, because without the critical schism into appearance and things in themselves the antinomies remain irresolvable.

But what remains unclear is how this rescues the notion of human free-will, which is after all the only reason the question of freedom becomes a problem in the first place. If freedom exists only in the noumenal dimension (of which we have no knowledge whatsoever) freedom of the will becomes a mystical power belonging to some unknowable, intelligible 'self' which pulls the strings of our phenomenal self while we remain perfectly unaware of who is really in charge.[72] Secondly, since the split into appearance and thing in itself applies to *everything*, what makes us any different from an acorn or a spoon? Are they too causally determined as phenomena and free in the noumenal sphere? But all Kant needed to show here is that freedom can logically co-exist with nature and can be conceived without contradiction, for only once *transcendental* freedom has been assumed as a possibility can *practical* freedom (i.e. freedom of the will) then be taken up.

The reason man differs from the rest of the natural world is that in addition to sensible receptivity he also cognises himself through pure apperception: 'viz., in actions and inner determinations that he cannot class at all with any impression of the senses. And thus he is to himself, indeed, on the one hand phenomenon, but on

[72] There is an interesting parallel here with recent cognitive science research, which has shown that patterns of cerebral activity can predict the outcome of a decision up to a second *before* we become consciously aware of the decision having been made. This would mean that whilst I remain lingering over where to sit in an empty lecture theatre my brain, unbeknownst to me, has already initiated the decision. Benjamin Libet, whose initial experiments in 1983 first drew attention to this phenomenon, believes that there is still a place for free will, but its role would be reduced to deciding to stop or override the action before it is carried out. Benjamin Libet, 'Can Conscious Experience Affect Brain Activity?', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10, no. 12 (2003): pp. 24–28.

the other hand – viz., in regard to certain powers – a merely intelligible object.'[73] Over and above the stream of sensuously given material I am also conscious of my own intellectual act of synthesis – the original unity of apperception, through which 'I am not conscious of myself as I *appear* to myself, nor as I *am* in myself, but am conscious only *that* I am'.[74] Thus, more than mere sensible appearance but still not consciousness of a noumenal self, I think myself in pure apperception only as the *consciousness of thinking*, the awareness of the results of intellectual synthesis being products of *my* spontaneous activity. Because of this awareness, which once again does not amount to *knowledge* of a purely intelligible self, we know ourselves to have not just a sensible but also an intelligible determining ground.

Therefore, in understanding and reason we have faculties of the mind which are not sensibly conditioned and which are capable of guiding our actions independently of sensuous impulses. What is more, through reason we have an ability to generate transcendental ideas which are *purely* intelligible, hence cannot be schematised and become objects for the senses, and this power has a causality of its own in determining our will. This other kind of coercion is manifested in the necessity imposed by the feeling of *ought*, which obviously cannot be found to occur anywhere in nature. We could not say that a cat ought not to chase mice any more than we could say that the sky ought to be blue, because nature knows nothing of ought, only what *is*, has been, or will be: 'Now this *ought* expresses a possible action whose basis is nothing but a mere concept, whereas the basis of a mere action of nature must always be an appearance.'[75] So human beings are unique in that alongside sensuous impulses such as hunger or tiredness we also have a purely

[73] Kant, *CPR*, A546/B574.
[74] Ibid., B157. [My emphasis.]
[75] Ibid., A547-8/B575-6.

conceptual determining influence expressed in the feeling of *ought*: I ought not to do that even though I want to. If we pay regard only to the sensuous causes behind our actions, there will always be mitigating factors such as upbringing, education, economic situation, etc., which are outside our control and can be considered as causes of our behaviour and the choices we have made. But this does not abrogate us from responsibility for our actions because we are also guided by reason, which provides us with another set of laws, namely the moral law, that elevates us above merely sensuous beings. Reason, being purely intelligible, is not subject to temporal conditions so it cannot be said to arise in time at a particular occasion leading to certain effects, it is the sensuously unconditioned and purely intelligible ground of our free will. All choices or actions except those governed by reason can be put down to pathological motives, so only when we act according to reason do we truly display freedom, as freedom *from* pathological drives. Nothing begins or ends in reason, it is timeless and unchanging, hence the law that reason prescribes is always the same; all that changes are the sensuous effects it has depending on the particular context.

The fact that in addition to our sensible, animal impulses we know ourselves to be subject to a *different* set of laws that can interrupt the chain of natural causes provides practical (although not theoretical) *proof* of the supersensible world of noumena. Freedom is a mere idea, which speculative reason can only *think* and appeal to problematically, whereas through practical reason freedom can be asserted as a fact: the very fact that I display freedom when I act according to the moral law. This latter manifests itself when I draft maxims of the will for myself that cannot be traced back to sensible conditions. An obvious example of such a

maxim would be to never tell a lie, even if it is contrary to my own interests. But because we can no more access the purely rational ideas governing morality through practical reason than we can through speculative reason, we cannot defer to these laws directly and know for certain what is the right and just thing to do in each case. Therefore, in legislating my behaviour I must have recourse to what Kant famously calls the Categorical Imperative: 'So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle of universal legislation.'[76] Hence I govern my actions only *indirectly*, not through immediate insight into supersensible ideas of 'the good' and 'justice'. If I wish to judge the morality of my actions I must ask what would be the outcome if this principle (e.g. never telling a lie) were to be a universal law and everyone acted accordingly. I cannot calculate it against an eternal measure of 'goodness', which is a mere idea and inaccessible to me. This indirectness is a result of the fact we are sensuous (finite) *as well as* rational beings. If we did not have this limitation then we would act unfailingly in accordance with the moral law and would have no need for the categorical imperative. In the same section of the *Critique of Judgement* that we cited above in relation to possibility and actuality, and how this division applies only because of the way our mind is structured, Kant also says this:

> Hence it is clear that it only springs from the subjective character of our practical faculty that the moral laws must be represented as commands, and the actions conformable to them as duties, and that reason expresses this necessity not as an '*is*' (an event) but as an 'ought to be' (as obligation). This would not occur if reason and its causality were considered as

[76] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Hereafter: *CPracR*) AA 30.

> independent of sensibility, that is, as free from the subjective condition of its application to objects in nature, and as being, consequently, a cause in an intelligible world perfectly harmonising with the moral law. For in such a world there would be no difference between obligation and act, or between a practical law as to what is possible through our agency and a theoretical law as to what we make actual.[77]

So if we were governed entirely by reason, in a word, *if we were not finite beings*, then our actions would be in complete accordance with the moral law and the distinction between *ought* and *is* would no longer apply. But in such a case, where the law has been internalised to the extent that it is no longer a coercive force, would we even be speaking of a *law* per se? As Derrida has emphasised, no one more than Kant has stressed the indissociability of law and force; while there are laws that are in practice not enforced, 'there is no law without enforceability and no applicability or enforceability of the law without force'.[78] A law (in this case, of morality) that would be followed or applied *without* the aspect of force, without being experienced as (either external or internal) coercion, is simply not a law. Our relationship to the law, Derrida writes elsewhere, is an 'interrupted' one – it commands us while remaining inaccessible to us.[79] Thus in order for the law to command me it is necessary that I remain forbidden from accessing it, for if I were

[77] Kant, *CoJ*, AA 403-4.
[78] Derrida, 'Force of Law', trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, (London & New York: Routledge, 2002) p. 233.
[79] Cf. 'Before the Law', trans. Avital Ronell and Christine Roulston, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Atridge, (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), in which Derrida undertakes a reading of Kafka's famous parable of the same title: 'For the law is prohibition/prohibited [*inderdit*]. Noun and attribute. Such would be the terrifying double-bind of its own taking-place. It is prohibition: this does not mean that it prohibits, but that it is itself prohibited, a prohibited place. It forbids itself and contradicts itself by placing the man in its own contradiction: one cannot reach the law, and in order to have a *rapport* of respect with it, *one must not* have a rapport with the law, *one must interrupt the relation*.' p. 203-4.

able to reach it and know it then I have power over it and its power over me is annulled.

The following of laws hence applies only to finite beings and not to God. In the second *Critique* this is what is named *holiness* of the will as opposed to *duty*, the former being the property of a 'maximally perfect being', while the latter pertains to 'every finite rational being.'[80] It is the lot of the finite being to strive after the ideal of holiness, 'in an uninterrupted but infinite progression',[81] without ever becoming equal to it. If we were to become totally equal to it then it would mean there being no possible desire or temptation at all to stray from the moral path. But is this not the definition of *automatism* and hence the exact opposite of *autonomy*? If we were mere animals without reason our actions would be determined entirely by sensuous impulses and instincts; but if we were free from animality altogether and purely rational beings we would be controlled by a higher but no less inhibiting set of 'laws'. Therefore, it would appear to be the case that we are only truly free insofar as we are *not* governed wholly by reason and do *not* have immediate access to the moral law, for *knowing* it would mean that we were unable to do otherwise. These laws are timeless and unchanging, so acting in total harmony with them would entail always acting the same way, like morally perfect machines. The paradox here which deserves to be emphasised is that we only display freedom when we act according to reason and the moral law, but if we acted *completely* in accordance with reason then we would *no longer be free*.

[80] Kant, *CPracR*, AA 82.
[81] Ibid. AA 83.

This is where we come back to Žižek, whose contention is that Kant's own identification of freedom as noumenal fundamentally misses the radical implications of his own thought, failing to recognise his key insight that freedom is *neither phenomenal nor noumenal*, but operates in the gap in between. As we saw above, the act of 'I think' (the transcendental unity of apperception), which accounts for our spontaneity is not a phenomenal appearance nor is it a noumenal entity; it is, as Žižek says, 'trans-phenomenal'.[82] It is an empty logical construct that is the vehicle of all empirical thought, thus 'in itself' it is nothing and it is known 'only through the thoughts that are its predicates, and apart from them we can never have the least concept of it'.[83] However, merely asserting the fact that I do not know *what* I am but only *that* I am is not enough, says Žižek, rather we must add that '*this lack of intuited content is constitutive of the I*'.[84] I can only think and act as a spontaneous being so long as my 'true' noumenal self (as Kant puts it 'this *I* or *he* or *it* (the thing) that thinks'[85]) remains inaccessible to me. Žižek astutely maps this *I* of transcendental apperception onto the Lacanian 'subject of the enunciation', and the void of this empty formal nothing is filled out with 'fantasmatic "stuff"', which forms the self-identity which we construct for ourselves (the 'subject of the enunciated') and which can never be identical to the mere 'I think', whose 'notion can never be filled out with intuited experiential reality.'[86] The subject, for Žižek, lacks its place in the 'great chain of being',[87] and cannot be integrated into reality. This neither/nor status of transcendental apperception is the reason why we are fundamentally 'out of joint' and hence free.

[82] Žižek, *Tarrying With the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) p. 14.
[83] Kant, *CPR*, A346/B404.
[84] Žižek, *Tarrying With the Negative*, p. 14.
[85] Kant, *CPR*, A346/B404.
[86] Žižek, *Tarrying With the Negative*, p. 14.
[87] Ibid., p. 12.

If mere consciousness of this thinking subject were to amount to an *intellectual intuition* of the self, '*I would thereby lose the very feature which makes me an I of pure apperception*; I would cease to be the spontaneous transcendental agent that constitutes reality.'[88]

Žižek identifies the same logic at work in Kant's ethical philosophy, in a passage he is fond of quoting from the *Critique of Practical Reason* bearing the grandiose subheading 'On the Wisely Commensurate Proportion of the Human Being's Cognitive Power to His Practical Vocation'. Here Kant asks the question, 'supposing now that nature had been compliant to our wish and had conferred on us that capacity for insight or that illumination which we would like to possess or which some perhaps even *fancy* themselves actually possessing' – namely, absolute knowledge or access to the noumenal dimension – 'what, presumably would be the consequences of this, as far as one can tell?' In such a case, '*unless our entire nature were at the same time transformed*' [my italics]:

> [Instead] of the conflict that the moral attitude now has to carry on with the inclinations, in which – after some defeats – moral fortitude of soul is yet gradually to be acquired, God and eternity, with their dreadful majesty would lie unceasingly before our eyes […] Transgression of the law would indeed be avoided; what is commanded would be done. However, the attitude from which actions ought to be done cannot likewise be instilled by any command, and the spur to activity is in this case immediately at hand and *external* […] Therefore most lawful actions would be done from fear,

[88] Ibid. p. 17.

> only a few from hope, and none at all from duty; and a moral worth of actions – on which alone, after all, the worth of the person and even that of the world hinges in the eyes of the highest wisdom – would not exist at all. The conduct of human beings, as long as their nature remained as it is, would thus be converted into a mere mechanism, where, as in a puppet show, everything would *gesticulate* well but there would still be *no life* in the figures.[89]

The difference between this passage and that which we took from the *Critique of Judgement* is that the latter imagines how a perfect being of reason without sensuous limitations would act, while this passage speculates upon what would happen if *we,* finite beings with our particular sensible makeup, were to be granted absolute insight into the noumenal dimension. The consequences, as we can see, would be catastrophic. The being of reason would act in total accord with the moral law because it is morally perfect, while the finite subject granted divine insight would act out of terror. The upshot in each case is that we would act according to the moral law not through choice or rectitude but because we would be incapable of doing otherwise, hence this would be no kind of freedom that we would recognise. True morality, for Kant, consists not only in acting according to the letter of the moral law but in doing so with pure motives, doing it because it is our duty – the 'right thing to do'. Any 'objectively' moral act that was carried out solely for our own gain, whether this is the hope of reward or simply the feeling of satisfaction of doing a good deed, would be counter to true morality. So in gaining insight into the

[89] Kant, *CPracR*, AA 146-7.

noumenal domain we would unfailingly fulfil our moral obligations but out of fear not duty and hence it would not be moral. As Žižek puts it,

> [The] inescapable conclusion is that, at the level of phenomena as well as at the noumenal level, we – humans – are 'mere mechanisms' with no autonomy and no freedom: as phenomena we are not free, we are part of nature, 'mere mechanisms,' totally submitted to causal links, part of the nexus of causes and effects; as noumena, we are again not free, but reduced to 'mere mechanisms' […] *Our freedom persists only in a space between the phenomenal and the noumenal*. It is therefore not that Kant simply limited causality to the phenomenal domain in order to be able to assert that, at the noumenal level, we are free autonomous agents: we are free only insofar as our horizon is that of the phenomenal, insofar as the noumenal domain remains inaccessible to us.[90]

The irony here is that in gaining 'the insight which we would like to possess' and which we think would allow us to throw off the shackles of bondage on the level of nature, this would only be to gain a new form of enslavement in a higher realm. So freedom must be conceived as the *act* which arrests the causal process and consists of the effects that the use of reason has *in the world of appearance*, rather than a state belonging to a higher being. So for Kant too, in spite of his own words to the contrary, freedom is strictly finite and, similar to Heidegger, stems from the fact that we are more than just another part of nature – i.e. transcendent – but yet without being entirely beyond it. So for both philosophers, any seemingly desirable

[90] Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 23.

overcoming of finitude would lead to the loss of that very freedom, such that the term ‘infinite freedom’ would appear to be an oxymoron.

Quentin Meillassoux and Intellectual Intuition

The final part of Žižek’s assertion having thus been demonstrated, we should now pause and take stock of where we stand as regards the first, most significant claim. After a thorough but by no means exhaustive investigation into what Kant designates by the term intellectual intuition, is there any credence to the suggestion that a technological instrument, however advanced we may conceive it to become, has the capacity to grant this faculty to human beings? We should refrain from the immediate temptation to reject this as hyperbolical and try to envisage the experience of using such a device and the potential power it would allow us. Heidegger characterises our relation to objects as one of use rather than mastery. We are surrounded by beings which confront us in their opacity and autonomy as outside of our power. However, the ability to command and manipulate such objects via thought would surely amount to a higher form of control which would chip away at the gulf separating ‘out there’ (external reality) from ‘in here’ (the mind).

So in terms of the ability that such a thing would grant us, let us take the example that Žižek uses, that of the human volunteers playing computer games with the mind. The technology the researchers developed was programmed to recognise the brain activity corresponding to the hand movements, so that instead of actually pressing buttons and manoeuvring the joystick they needed merely to think these

movements, and these thoughts directly controlled the game. Immediately we can see that simply because it is the brain that is in control rather than the hands, it would not necessarily make the user any better at the game. This sounds trivial but the point is that it would not be a new form of total mastery and we are still a step removed. After all, if my brain were completely in control I could command it (the game) to do anything I desired, but if these thoughts are concerned only with what my hands would ordinarily be doing if I were using a joystick then essentially this is no greater control than we had already. We ran up against similar limits with regard to the brain computer interface for music in the previous chapter, and how we could not expect it to channel previously untapped creative talent.

The other technological procedures we explored, which scan the brain and display a 'live feed' of inner phenomenological experience come somewhat closer to what we are dealing with. It should not be underestimated how profoundly uncanny it would feel to see a digital rendering of a mental image appear on a screen. Sometimes we can find it jarring to discover that an event happened differently to how we remember it, but how much more disconcerting would such an experience be if that event was something that happened in my own mind, such as a dream. These will be some of the themes of the following chapter, but for now all that needs to be considered is whether this would in any respect triumph over finitude. Superficially at least, the prospect of 'creating' an object through and by means of thought alone would seem to be akin to the divine faculty, but as we have drawn attention to again and again, the thought that generates this object is itself structurally dependent on receptivity and hence finite. The objects of the divine mind are not assembled from sensuous data but are pure creation, and since these

systems would be a kind of appendage or prosthesis to thought and not a rewiring of our cognition, such a faculty would still seem to be beyond us.

Finally, most crucially, intellectual intuition, as well as being the spontaneous creation of its own object, is the intuition of a purely *intelligible* entity, and we as finite beings can have knowledge only of sensuously given appearances. We can never travel 'outside' our own thought of an object to access what or how the object thought about *is* independently of our thinking about it. This is the prevailing doxa of post-Kantian philosophy, the very idea of thought being able to have positive knowledge of something absolute – the impossible Real – outside of the knowing subject, being consigned to the metaphysical dustbin. So no matter how much psychical control over external reality we may be granted by cognitive technology, so long as we remain forever barred from reality *in itself* intellectual intuition seems chimerical. Finitude haunts us at every turn, not for nothing is it so closely associated with the phrase 'always-already'. Moreover, this inability, characterised by Kant as an epistemological limitation, has since been hardened into a positive ontological thesis. So while Kant holds fast to the notion of an *in itself* completely distinct from our knowledge that is at least thinkable, in subsequent philosophies, particularly the post-Husserlian school of phenomenology, the very idea of a reality 'in itself', that is not *for* some transcendental consciousness is completely unthinkable.

The French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux calls this thesis *correlationism*, which consists in 'disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of

subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another.'[91] In other words, there is no subject that is not already related to an object (the paradigmatic case being Heidegger's account of being-in-the-world) and no possibility of thinking an object 'in itself', abstracted from its relation to a subject. This reciprocity of the terms, or 'the correlation', is considered to be *prior* to the terms themselves, so there is not a self-subsisting subject who only subsequently encounters a world, nor a pre-existing world which then appears to a subject; each only *is* in so far as it is for the other. Clearly it is the second claim that would provoke the most astonishment for the non-philosopher, for the idea that the self must always-already be related to a world is comparatively easy to grasp, but the notion that being itself only *is* so long as it is disclosed to consciousness is rather more incredible. As Meillassoux puts it,

> [One] could say that up until Kant, one of the principle problems of philosophy was to think substance, while ever since Kant it has consisted in trying to think the correlation [… To] discover what divides rival philosophers is no longer to ask who has grasped the true nature of substantiality, but rather to ask who has grasped the more originary correlation.[92]

This correlationism pervades analytic philosophy every bit as much as the post-phenomenological continental schools, manifesting itself in the guise of language in the former and consciousness in the latter. Both language and consciousness provide us with our only access to the outside world, while simultaneously keeping us at an infinite distance from it. We can get no neutral, external vantage point from

[91] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London & New York: Continuum, 2008) p. 5.
[92] Ibid., p. 6.

which to observe either ourselves or the world because we are imprisoned within interiority, but it is an interiority which is 'transparent', offering us a partial perspective on the outside.

Philosophy has thus backed itself into an ever-shrinking corner, denying to itself the tools with which to think the '*great outdoors*', as Meillassoux evocatively puts it.[93] This means that any scientific truth-claim about the nature of being cannot be confirmed or denied through reference to its intrinsic adequation to the phenomena under investigation but only via the intersubjective agreement of the scientific community. Moreover, this correlationist circle is seemingly impossible to escape from and there is a watertight set of arguments designed to refute anyone who attempts to do so, all of which following the same lines, insisting that there is no way for thought to know what *is* when there is no thought, since it cannot escape itself and isolate this supposedly self-subsistent reality from the thought about it. All realism is characterised as 'naïve' and unthinking, failing to grasp the originary status of the correlation. But Meillassoux uncovers a devastatingly simple break in the circle via what he calls the problem of the 'arche-fossil', and the domain of *ancestrality* that such phenomena attest to. If a fossil in the usual sense of the term is a substance bearing traces of ancient animal and plant life, the arche-fossil points to a reality – ancestrality – anterior to the emergence of life itself. Such data include radioactive isotopes or the light emissions from distant stars, etc., which allow scientists to form knowledge about such events as the origin of the universe or the first appearance of life on earth, all of which occurred billions of years prior to the emergence of humankind. The philosophical significance of such scientific claims

[93] Ibid., p. 7.

becomes clear once we ask how the correlationist is to account for them. Here is what Kant has to say about such scientific investigation: 'because the world does not exist in itself at all (i.e., independently of the regressive series of my presentations), it exists neither as *a whole that is infinite in itself* nor as *a whole that is finite in itself*. The world is to be met with only in the empirical regression of the series of appearances, and not at all by itself.'[94] Therefore the truth of the referent in such a claim is not what is at issue, only what the claim purports to be *about*. For Kant we can indeed interrogate as far back as our scientific instruments allow but what we uncover in such investigation exists only in and for the empirical regression, hence not *in itself*, prior to its being known and merely waiting to be discovered. So the scientist's claims will be valid as far as it goes, so long as he does not assert that such findings are true of reality in itself and independent of his knowing it (thus claiming to know what cannot be known.)

Regardless of how much it purportedly departs from Kant, all correlationism, says Meillassoux, must add variants of this same caveat to scientific knowledge. For the correlationist, the arche-fossil cannot be the '*givenness of a being anterior to givenness*', which would be nonsensical; rather, it '*gives itself* as anterior to givenness'.[95] In accounting for such data, the scientist cannot *start* from the ancestral past but can only carry out a '*retrojection of the past on the basis of the present*.'[96] Science does not amass objective knowledge of a world existing in itself but only the present indicators of a past which gives itself to consciousness as existing prior to consciousness and independently of it. So again, the correlationist does not question the veracity of the claim but only supplements this claim with a

[94] Kant, *CPR*, A505/B533.
[95] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 14.
[96] Ibid., p. 16.

subtle and seemingly innocuous qualification. The 'basic' level of meaning contained in ancestral statements – that such and such an event happened X years before the advent of the human species – is 'deepened' by the understanding that this is true only on the basis of the consensus of the present scientific community. For the correlationist, such a reality simply cannot have existed in the way science claims, i.e., uncorrelated to consciousness. 'A world is meaningful only as given-to-a-living (or thinking)-being. Yet to speak of the "emergence of life" is to evoke the emergence of manifestation amidst a world that pre-existed it.'[97] But as Meillassoux notes, such a supplement does not deepen the scientific statement but annuls it altogether, such that 'either this statement has a realist sense, and *only* a realist sense, or it has none at all.'[98] In short, if the big bang is not an account of how the universe actually came about, independently of human knowledge about this event, then it has no meaning or use for science whatsoever.

The standard supposition that the correlationist would appeal to in order to make such an event thinkable would be to add that *had there been a witness* then it would have been perceived to have taken place as the scientist describes. But the problem of ancestrality cannot be reduced to the standard Berkeleyan 'if a tree falls and there is no one there to hear it…' cliché, because the latter case is contemporaneous with givenness as such while the former points to a time which pre-exists manifestation itself. As Meillassoux puts it, 'the ancestral does not designate an absence *in* the given, and *for* givenness, but rather an absence *of* givenness'.[99] Thus, for Meillassoux, the emergence of the finite *can* be accounted for, and quite simply. It is merely an event that occurred with the evolution of the human species, not

[97] Ibid., p. 15.
[98] Ibid., p. 17.
[99] Ibid.. p. 21.

some profound ontological schism that splits being off from itself. This, as we have seen, is exactly the problem that could not be accounted for from within the 'correlation' – the coming into being of the correlation itself. Finitude then, or manifestation, is not the irreducible condition of there being a world but is an 'intra-worldly occurrence',[100] prior to which and alongside which, being itself persists in complete indifference and autonomy.

In renouncing its claim to the absolute, philosophy has willingly handed it over to divine revelation or new age spiritualism and has denied itself the ground on which to challenge such beliefs on the basis of their intrinsic absurdity or irrationality. The inherent modesty of correlationism leads inevitably to agnosticism where religion is concerned, any claim about the afterlife being held to be equally valid so long as no pretension to positive knowledge is assumed. From this perspective atheism is a belief no more or less valid than theism and can make no greater claim to rationality. The 'belief' that there is no life after death is every bit as unfounded as the belief in a heavenly afterlife. Consider, for example, Heidegger in the 'Letter on "Humanism"', where the thought of being is said to be as little theistic as atheistic, '[not], however, because of an indifferent attitude, but out of respect for the boundaries that have been set for thinking as such'.[101] This, Meillassoux argues, points to the unstated fideism upon which correlationism is founded and which has led to '*an exacerbated return of the religious*.'[102] For not only does it leave a space open for piety and religious fanaticism, it actually encourages it by making it all the more appealing since only it stakes a claim to absolute truth.

[100] Ibid., p. 14.
[101] Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Pathmarks*, p. 267.
[102] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 45.

But there is yet another kind of absolute that must also be warded off, which consists in the absolutisation of the correlation itself, Hegel being the emblematic case. On such an account, if the 'in itself' is inaccessible to us this is only because there is nothing at all outside the correlation, the latter being held to be eternal and necessary. The 'in itself' is hereby annulled altogether, becoming merely a modality of the 'for us', a way in which it presents itself to us. The guardrail against this last absolute is the insistence upon the facticity, hence non-necessity, of the correlation. We saw how for Kant, space, time and the categories can only be described and never accounted for, and how for Heidegger our being-in-the-world is conditioned by thrownness. Both take this to be the ultimate limit of knowledge and the very mark of our finitude.

So if Hegel took the logical next step from the Kantian system in absolutising the very hindrance keeping us at an infinite distance *from* the absolute (the correlation), Meillassoux then does exactly the same thing with the barrier erected against this latter kind of absolute – namely facticity itself. In an extraordinary piece of reasoning, the intricacies of which we need not go into here, Meillassoux asserts that facticity, far from being the mere limit beyond which our knowledge cannot go, constitutes positive knowledge of the absolute. The nub of the argument is that in *thinking* the non-necessity of the correlation, which is required in order to fend off absolute idealism, the correlationist thinks a stratum of being that is not the correlate of her thinking, precisely because it pertains to her own non-being, and hence the non-existence of the correlation. The absolute thus thought but unacknowledged is the '*capacity-to-be-other as such* […, the] *possible transition*,

devoid of reason, of my state towards any other state whatsoever.'[103] The neat reversal that Meillassoux performs here is to show that, in order to protect herself against the idealist, the correlationist must aver the necessity of the correlation's contingency, but in doing so she transgresses the correlationist circle at the same time as she reinforces it. So while facticity in the negative sense is our inability to find a reason why we are or why what is *is*, facticity in the positive sense projects this absence of reason into being itself, such that the absolute *is* the absolute absence of reason or necessity for anything to be or remain the way it is. The crucial difference between the two is that while the former maintains a disavowed belief that such a reason may exist but we are unable to know it, Meillassoux asserts that there is *no* reason why we exist *and we know this*.

The full consequences of thinking this absolute unreason (or the 'principle of factiality') are rather unsettling and counter-intuitive: if there is no reason behind anything, everything could change and become other at any time or even maintain a period of indefinite stasis. This applies to all natural laws as well as to the phenomena governed by such laws, all of which are susceptible to destruction or variation at any given time for no reason at all. Thus the absolute which Meillassoux claims to have uncovered is a '*hyper-Chaos*',[104] in which anything at all could happen from one time to the next and the only necessity is the absolute absence of necessity. So Meillassoux blurs the distinction between real and logical possibility that Kant insisted upon. For Kant, as we saw, real possibility is conditioned by necessary laws, and anything that we conceive of beyond these laws is certainly 'possible', since conceivable, but not in the sense of 'could become

[103] Ibid., p. 56.
[104] Ibid., p. 64.

actual'. But if we no longer have faith in the necessity of laws then anything at all is equally possible according to reason. It is every bit as possible for the sun *not* to rise tomorrow morning as it is for it to do so. Simply because up until now it always has done is no argument in favour of its continuing to do so.

The obvious question which forces itself upon this thesis is this: if the laws of nature *could* change at any moment and no necessity holds them in place why do they not *constantly* change? Why, when I throw a ball into the air does it always return back down to be caught rather than continuing up and up or even disappearing in a puff of smoke? Meillassoux's deft response is that such an expectation, namely for the non-necessity of natural laws to entail their incessant change, rests on *probabilistic* reasoning, which derives from a confusion of contingency with *chance*. Chance, Meillassoux argues, is always – and only – calculable based on *a totality of possible cases*, so the probability of throwing certain dice-combinations can be calculated by taking into account the number of sides of the die and the amount of throws. If we kept landing on the same number again and again after hundreds of throws this would amount to a spectacular run of fortune unless we assumed that there were some necessity underlying it, namely that the die has been loaded. The higher the number of possible results the more improbable such consistency would become. Applying this reasoning based on chance to natural laws, the fact that out of the infinity of possible occurrences the ball always comes back down to earth can only lead us to the conclusion that the laws of gravity are *necessary* and *unalterable*, for otherwise this would be ludicrously improbable.

However, as Meillassoux has it, this is based on an unstated ontological hypothesis; namely, that 'the possible' constitutes a whole or a totality, analogous to the number of faces of the die. If the faces of the die could not be totalised then the fact that the same number or combination of numbers kept recurring could not strike us as odd or contrary to the laws of chance because such laws would no longer apply and there would be nothing against which the probability of such an occurrence could be measured. So if everything that could possibly happen (e.g. to the ball when I throw it up into the air) does not amount to a totality, then probabilistic reasoning would no longer hold and the contingency of the laws of nature need have nothing whatsoever to do with frequency of change. This is exactly the thesis that Meillassoux puts forward via the application of Cantorian set-theory, which allows us to think a multiplicity of infinities which cannot be totalised in some 'set of all sets'. In Meillassoux's own lucid description, 'take any set, count its elements, then compare this number to the number of possible groupings of these elements […] You will always obtain the same result: the set B of possible groupings (or parts) of a set A is always bigger than A – *even if A is infinite*.'[105] Therefore, since this provides us with a scheme for at least *thinking* a non-totalisable set of possibilities, it de-legitimises the probabilistic inference, leaving us with no valid reason to be surprised that the laws have remained the same for as long as they have. In spite of this, if we were still to ask why or how this stability of laws came about, the answer given would be 'for no reason', and there is no reason behind their persistence either. Only thus can reason overcome irrational faith in providence or divine harmony.

[105] Ibid., p. 104.

Meillassoux's ultimate aim is to secure the absolute reach of mathematical discourse, such that the properties of a thing that can be described mathematically are properties belonging to the thing in itself, having no reference to thought.[106] This he believes he moves towards by establishing thought's access to absolute contingency, and from this concluding that '*whatever is mathematically conceivable is absolutely possible*.'[107] But the case for the absolutisation of mathematics is not conclusively made, since this book is only a brief introductory piece to what will no doubt become a fully systematic philosophical project, and the problem of ancestrality is never wholly reconciled with the 'principle of factiality'. Its achievement, nonetheless, is that it does convincingly pave the way for philosophy to regain its 'speculative' scope by rediscovering thought's relation to the absolute.

However, let us interrogate this relation a little closer. If through this knowledge of the necessity of facticity we gain access to a purely intelligible absolute, just what kind of knowledge is it? Clearly it cannot be gathered through sensible intuition because it is exactly our senses that impose upon us the belief in the necessity of natural laws, through habit and superstition, while from a rational point of view nothing at all supports such an inference. It is here that Meillassoux, somewhat surprisingly, has recourse to the Kantian concept of intellectual intuition:

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[106] In parentheses we might want to ask whether Meillassoux would consider the discourse of cognitive science to enable access to the mathematical 'in itself' of *thought*. If what is rendered mathematically holds of the object whether it is thought about or not, what if that object is thought itself? But as we saw with Kant (and Žižek) above, the transcendental distinction does not apply to the 'trans-phenomenal' (neither noumenal nor phenomenal) act of *I think*, thus we cannot even speak of an 'in itself' of thought. Reconciling the bare facts of neuronal activity with the 'first person' phenomenological experience is after all the so-called 'hard problem' that philosophers of mind and scientists alike have been grappling with for many years. This is what Žižek calls the 'ultimate parallax – this absolute gap between the experience of encountering somebody and the "nothing behind" of the open skull.' *The Parallax View*, p. 163.
[107] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 117.

> [We] discover in our grasp of facticity the veritable *intellectual intuition* of the absolute. 'Intuition', because it is actually in what is that we discover a contingency with no limit other than itself; 'intellectual' because this contingency is neither visible nor perceptible in things and only thought is capable of accessing it, just as it accesses the chaos that underlies the apparent continuity of phenomena.[108]

Evidently it is not being employed in a faithful Kantian sense, because here thought accesses absolute being while by no means *creating* it, but it is nothing less than *noumenal insight*, as described by Kant in the passage we quoted above. However, in a move exactly counter to Kant's, such a knowledge does not impress upon us the terrifying divine majesty of all things but rather the complete absence of any necessity, whether divine or otherwise. Knowledge is thus radically separated from the senses, indeed on this point is shown to be in direct conflict with the senses.

Now we are entitled to ask, as Kant did in the letter to Herz, how we are to guarantee the necessary reference of this intellectual intuition to the nature of being itself. The two alternatives Kant presents us with surely still apply: either the innately mathematical essence of being gives itself to thought, or thought projects its logical reasoning into being. However, neither option is available to Meillassoux, since taking the former would commit him to an untenable Pythagorean ontology, which he has already explicitly ruled out, and the latter, as we know, is intellectual intuition in the Kantian sense. This is why for Kant

[108] Ibid., p. 82.

intellectual intuition could never be *receptive*, because it is impossible to conceive of how its object would be transmitted to thought. The very bedrock of Meillassoux's enterprise is the thesis that mathematics allows us access to a reality independent of thought, but if this is merely thought's projection onto reality then we are not yet free of the correlationist circle. Ray Brassier makes a similar point, writing that if reality is 'neither inherently mathematical nor *necessarily* intelligible', why should we assume that being is susceptible to intellectual intuition?[109] If this reference is itself also intuited intellectually then too much is conceded to thought and correlationism creeps back in.

In the face of Brassier's criticisms, Meillassoux clarified his position somewhat, opting instead to employ the oxymoronic term 'dianoetic intuition', meaning 'the essential intertwining of a simple intuition and of a discursivity, a demonstration – both being entailed by the access to factuality.'[110] As he goes on to explain, if in order to break out of the correlationist circle we were to merely posit an autonomous real axiomatically, the correlationist will always have the rejoinder that this supposedly autonomous real is still *posited* by thought. The only remaining strategy is the one taken by *After Finitude*, namely to start from within the circle of correlationism and demonstrate how, in order to maintain its consistency, it must itself appeal to an absolute – facticity:

> Hence, the only way to the Real, according to me, is through a proof, a *demonstration*: a demonstration unveils that facticity is not an *ignorance* of the hidden reasons of all things but a *knowledge* of the absolute contingency

[109] Ray Brassier, 'The Enigma of Realism: On Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*', *Collapse* 2 (2007): p. 46.
[110] Meillassoux, 'Speculative Realism', *Collapse* 3 (2007): p. 433.

> of all things. The simple intuition of facticity is transmuted by a *dianoia*, by a demonstration, into an intuition of a radical exteriority […] We have a *nous* unveiled by a *dianoia*, an intuition unveiled by a demonstration. This is why I called it an intellectual intuition: not, of course, because it is an intuition which creates its object, as Kant defined it, but because it is an intuition discovered by reasoning.[111]

A direct intuition could never give us access to the Real, because as the correlationist would remind us, we only ever intuit our own phenomenal presentations, but a simple logical positing of the Real from which we then draw conclusions will not satisfy the correlationist either. So intellectual (or dianoetic) intuition in Meillassoux's sense is not an immediate, all-at-once revelation of the way things are but is the logical explication of a prior intuition. Through rational demonstration this intuition (of facticity) is shown to be not what we thought it was. What had seemed to be the insurmountable limit to thought and the essence of finitude is, through intellectual intuition, revealed to be the key to the very overcoming of finitude.

Clearly we have travelled some way from where we set out, and have arrived at a form of intellectual intuition unrecognisable from its Kantian rendering, but although this may not be the overcoming of finitude that we were looking for it is quite compelling in the manner in which it frees thought from its self-imposed limits. Our first approach, following Žižek's initial lead and faithfully recreating the

[111] Ibid., pp. 433-4.

Kantian structure of cognition, was crucial in setting out the scope of the problem, but ultimately it could not enable us to reach the goal we were seeking. For if these technologies are to fulfil the extraordinary promise they seem to present then there would need to be a capacity in the mind that exceeds receptivity and finitude, even if this is not that of the divine intellectual intuition as Žižek holds. As we have seen, for Kant, and even more so for Heidegger, finitude is so core to our being that any desire to 'overcome' the finite rests on a misunderstanding; we view it as a restriction or constraint when in truth it is the positive condition of everything that makes us what we are. Thus at every turn we hit against limits that could not be negotiated, which made it necessary to depart from the Kantian system. So our recourse to Meillassoux has been primarily strategic, enabling us to move beyond Kant and the always-already of receptivity which provides the answer to every question before it has been asked. While Meillassoux's model of intellectual intuition may no longer relate directly to the technologies we are considering it has allowed us at least to conceive of a form of subjectivity that is not enslaved to receptivity, and hence always closed off in advance to the possibility of a non-receptive creativity. By enabling thought to once again exceed itself and reconnect with the Real, Meillassoux facilitates an important first breach of the seemingly incommensurable gap between mind and matter. This may provide encouragement to seek to undermine it still further, and attempt once more to uncover a resource in the mind that is not sensibly conditioned.

Chapter Three: *Unus Mundus*

The meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's own shadow. The shadow is a tight passage, a narrow door, whose painful constriction no one is spared who goes down to the deep well. But one must learn to know oneself in order to know who one is. For what comes after the door is, surprisingly enough, a boundless expanse full of unprecedented uncertainty, with apparently no inside and no outside, no above and no below, no here and no there, no mine and no thine, no good and no bad. It is the realm of water, where all life floats in suspension; where the realm of the sympathetic system, the soul of everything living, begins; where I am indivisibly this and *that; where I experience the other in myself and the other-than-myself experiences me.*

– C.G. Jung, 'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious'[1]

In the first chapter of *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Freud addresses a facet of the religious experience, the absence of which from his earlier polemic *The Future of an Illusion* was drawn to his attention by his friend, the renowned French dramatist and novelist Romain Rolland: 'this, he says, consists in a peculiar feeling, which he himself is never without, which he finds confirmed by many others, and which he would like to call a sensation of "eternity", a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded – as it were, "oceanic".'[2] This *oceanic* feeling is, according to Rolland, the origin of all religious sentiment – the sense that something within us escapes the finite, embodied limits of subjectivity. In New Age terms this is that immediate sensation of 'oneness' with the universe, of being part of something larger than

[1] *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* vol. 9.1, p. 21.
[2] *Civilisation and its Discontents*, 1930 (Standard Ed. 21) p. 64.

ourselves; in the Judaeo-Christian tradition it could be equated with the Kingdom of God, and in Buddhism, the annihilation of the self. Freud, the great demystifier, traces the origin of this affect to the all-encompassing ego of the newborn infant who as yet does not distinguish internal from external, only gradually learning to do so in the face of a *lack*. For while some urges can be satisfied at any time and some sources of excitation can be felt at any moment, others – 'among them what he desires most of all, his mother's breast'[3] – escape him and are not under his immediate control. Desires such as these can only be brought to satisfaction by crying and screaming for attention. It is through this experience that the child first '[sets] over against the ego an "object", in the form of something which exists "outside" and which is only forced to reappear by a special action.'[4] The 'object', discovered as not being a part of the child's own ego, thus makes its first appearance in the upsurge of desire and the experience of a lack: a need, the satisfaction of which is not in the child's power. Crying is the initial and most basic means of reaching out into the external world to bring about this satisfaction that cannot be regulated internally.

So while 'originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself', leaving us with a 'shrunken residue of a much more inclusive – indeed an all-embracing – feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it.'[5] The oceanic is thus the persistence of this lost unity, endowing those who are affected by it with the sense that what they now perceive to be their egoic self is the remainder of something more expansive, which most religious doctrines promise we will return to after we die.

[3] Ibid., p. 67.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., p. 68.

Auto-Satisfaction, or, How to Bypass Reality

This narrative of individuation through the ego's severance from the external world is a fundamental concept in Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud proposes as a useful fiction the hypothesis that our highly advanced psychical apparatus developed out of the primitive need to minimise excitation (this is the 'principle of constancy' or the 'Nirvana principle'[6]) and that the earliest stage of this apparatus had as its only function to '[keep] itself so far as possible free from stimuli; consequently its first structure followed the plan of a reflex apparatus, so that any sensory excitation impinging on it could be promptly discharged along a motor path'.[7] Subsequently this primitive organism finds that the exigencies of life disturb and upset the success of this self-contained system, for needs such as hunger cause an excitation that cannot be removed via purely internal means:

> A change can only come about if in some way or other (in the case of the baby, through outside help) an 'experience of satisfaction' can be achieved which puts an end to the internal stimulus. An essential component of this experience of satisfaction is a particular perception (that of nourishment, in our example) the mnemic image of which remains associated thenceforward with the memory trace of the excitation produced by the need. As a result of the link that has thus been established, next time this need arises a psychical impulse will at once emerge which will seek to re-cathect the mnemic image of the perception and to re-evoke the perception itself, that is to say, to re-establish the situation of the original satisfaction. An impulse of this kind is

[6] Cf. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920 (Standard Ed. 18), p. 9 ('...constancy') and p. 56. ('Nirvana...')
[7] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900 (Standard Ed. 5) p. 565.

> what we call a wish; the reappearance of the perception is the fulfilment of the wish; and the shortest path to the fulfilment of the wish is a path leading direct from the excitation produced by the need to a complete cathexis of the perception. Nothing prevents us from assuming that there was a primitive state of the psychical apparatus in which this path was actually traversed, that is, in which wishing ended in hallucinating. Thus the aim of this first psychical activity was to produce a 'perceptual identity' – a repetition of the perception which was linked with the satisfaction of the need.[8]

So in this primitive, self-sufficient state, when a biological need forced itself upon the organism it found satisfaction in the hallucinatory recall of a previous perception in which this need was satisfied. No sooner has the need or wish arisen than it is perceived to be satiated. This structure, Freud suggests, persists in dreams where unconscious wishes are represented in the perceptual system as fulfilled, albeit disguised by the various means of censorship. However, in waking life, 'bitter experience' will have necessitated the evolution of this inefficient hallucinatory course of fulfilment into 'a more expedient secondary one.'[9] Since the hallucinatory satisfaction of a need such as hunger does not actually satisfy the biological need it developed in response to, it was found necessary to 'seek out other paths which lead eventually to the desired perceptual identity being established from the direction of the external world.'[10] Thus while this early stage of development is dominated entirely by the pleasure principle, its place is subsequently usurped by the reality principle, which leads to a supplementary

[8] Ibid., p. 566
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

detour to the original satisfaction. External reality will not immediately satisfy our every need so we must adopt a pragmatic approach, involving what Freud calls 'reality-testing': assessing whether an internal perception corresponds with external reality and taking the necessary steps to bring it about or modify it accordingly. But it all develops as a supplement to the original system which was found to be inadequate. This is, for Freud, technology at its purest: a tool or instrument through which we make the external world more accommodating to our needs, easing or hastening satisfaction. All subsequent technological developments are, at base, designed to make this process easier still. However, are we now on the cusp of advancing to such a stage that the external, technological, means by which we satisfy these needs become *so* efficient, *so* successful, that it restores us to this primitive state of auto-gratification?

The future promised by the 'Bluetooth in your head that translates your thoughts into actions' that we encountered in the first chapter must surely, taken to its logical conclusion, lead to the reinstatement of the pleasure principle to its place of predominance at the expense of the reality principle. In an ongoing research project at the Fondazione Santa Lucia research hospital in Rome, a mock-up of a home controlled entirely by thought has been successfully piloted, in which opening and closing doors, activating lights, answering the telephone and controlling a small robot is all operated by a strip of electrodes on the head picking up brain activity signalling 'interest' in a particular action which is then sent to a computer and translated into the desired act.[11] The branch of research into such thought-controlled environments bears the rather prosaic name 'assistive domotics', but its

[11] F. Babiloni et al, 'On the Use of Brain–Computer Interfaces Outside Scientific Laboratories: Toward an Application in Domotic Environments', *International Review of Neurobiology* 86 (2009): pp. 133-146.

implications are extraordinary. Already most of our electronic appliances – televisions, computers, hi-fi stereos – can be integrated and connected to each other wirelessly to form one hyper-functional system and it is now increasingly likely that at some stage within the next few decades, instead of a remote control operated by hand, this could all be activated merely by thought. If the subject craves something to eat or drink the microwave oven or the coffee machine would immediately start up and a robotic machine then brings it on a tray; the television would be correlated to his attention-span, instantly switching channel as soon as his interest dips; a query pops into his mind and a computer promptly finds it on a search engine; he thinks of a song and it downloads from the internet and starts playing on the stereo. But this automatic realisation of even the most fleeting desire, causing a veritable flood of information, could only lead to utter indolence to the point of paralysis, much like the eponymous film cartridge in David Foster-Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest*, which is so entertaining and addictive that whoever views it is reduced to a catatonic state, immobilised, and losing all interest in doing anything other than watching the film.

For Freud, thinking is 'an experimental kind of acting',[12] which is essentially the same as the definition of the scientific method described by Karl Popper (cited in the first chapter), whereby instead of perishing along with our false theories we let them 'die in our stead.' In the metapsychological system, the ego interposes itself between the desires of the id and access to motility, postponing motor discharge until it has satisfied the demands of thought and judgement. 'In this way it has dethroned the pleasure principle which dominates the course of events in the id

[12] 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning', 1911 (Standard Ed. 12) p. 221.

without any restriction.'[13] And so once again we touch upon the importance of this intervening gap between intention and deed, which these technologies seem to bypass. Instead of needing to adjust our goal of attaining pleasure in accordance with the reality principle we can actively and instantly adjust and rearrange *reality* in accordance with the pleasure principle. Unconscious repressed processes, says Freud, 'disregard reality-testing; they equate reality of thought with external actuality, and wishes with their fulfilment – with the event – just as happens automatically under the ancient dominance of the pleasure principle.'[14] Waking life would then have the pattern of dreaming, where wishes are immediately fulfilled, although no longer merely in the form of a hallucination. (Furthermore, we each know the frequency with which obscene or unsavoury thoughts and desires are prone to arise unbidden into one's mind at any given moment, but at least we have the comfort of knowing that others cannot see what we are thinking and we have the self-control not to act on these impulses. However, unless we were to establish some manner of filter such as parents of young children put in place on the Internet there would be nothing to prevent such momentary thoughts from gaining an outlet and being exhibited for others to see. It would be somewhat ironic if we were compelled to develop a supplementary technological system of censorship to replace the self-restraint that these very devices would apparently override.)

If we think of the state governed by the pleasure principle as an autopoietic system with a break in the circuit where reality intervenes, the 'Bluetooth in your head' would be inserted into the system as if to close the loop, and the exigencies of 'reality testing', and of modifying and subordinating our instincts towards

[13] 'The Dissection of the Psychical Personality', *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 1933 (Standard Ed. 22) p. 76.
[14] 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning', p. 225.

satisfaction in accord with objective reality would be bypassed or overcome. What we wish for or crave would find immediate gratification with no delay and no effort expended. However, a subject immersed in this system could surely have no experience of an event; for when the field of the possible, of what-may-come, is saturated in advance by need or by desire – in short, by the subject's own projection onto the future – there would be no opening for the unexpected to occur, or for anything truly to *happen* to the subject, unless it were on the order of a disaster (such as death, or a power cut.) And where there is no relation of stimulus to response, but instead a pure immediacy, there would be no notion even of temporal succession: past and future would merge into an indistinct plateau. It is clear that we would no longer even be speaking of a subject but rather a wholly passive, pacified and de-subjectivised organism. Such a development would seem to bear out Freud's gambit in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that all techno-cultural advances are essentially regressive, constituting a 'new path' to an 'ancient goal' – the goal of inertia.[15]

So if the reality principle is that which comes to modify and domesticate the pleasure principle, it seems that what we would be dealing with here would amount to the immediate self-perpetuating presence of pleasure: auto-satisfaction. However, this obviously would be to simplify matters somewhat, implying that the reality principle is *secondary* and a merely provisional delay or deviation and disregarding the extent to which this economic detour of reality structures and constitutes pleasure itself.[16] As Derrida has put it, '[pure] pleasure and pure reality

[15] *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 38.
[16] As is well known, Freud never ceased to modify and revise the concept of the pleasure principle. Up until very late in his life it was held to be coextensive with the ancient aim of minimising stimulation, but as he later admits, 'there are pleasurable tensions and unpleasurable relaxations of

are ideal limits, which is as much as to say fictions', each deriving from a common 'necessarily impure' root: namely, *différance*.[17] It is something of a truism that pleasure is very often found more in the postponement of satisfaction than in the satisfaction itself, and that satisfaction in fact frequently leaves us *un*satisfied and deflated; so the instant gratification of any and every wish would surely lead rather to extreme lethargy than to some orgiastic overdose of enjoyment. As Freud himself writes, '[when] any situation that is desired by the pleasure principle is prolonged, it only produces a feeling of mild contentment.'[18] The injunction to attain to a state of 'pure pleasure' commanded by the pleasure principle, then, is one that is impossible to fulfil but equally impossible to take leave of. So everyone takes his or her own path towards this limit but none ever reaches the final destination:

> It is a question of how much real satisfaction [a man] can expect to get from the external world, how far he is led to make himself independent of it, and, finally, how much strength he feels he has for altering the world to suit his wishes.[19]

However, neuroprosthetic technologies would act as a great leveller, endowing every man with an equal capacity for altering the external world in accordance with his wishes (assuming of course – a very big if – that such technologies were

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tension.' ('The Economic Problem of Masochism', 1924, Standard Ed. 19, p. 160.) With the introduction of the death drive and its opposition to the libidinal (life) drives, the problem was resolved: the principle of constancy is tied to the death drive – the drive towards an inanimate state – while the pleasure principle represents a modification – from quantity to quality – of the principle of constancy due to the demands of the libidinal drives. The reality principle supervenes onto these two principles, thus completing the picture. (Ibid.)

[17] Derrida, 'To Speculate – On "Freud"', *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) p. 284.

[18] Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, p. 76.

[19] Ibid., p. 83.

indiscriminately available to all.) Due to man's essential constitution, however, this latest contrivance would simply lead to yet another inexorable detour.

Materialised Memory

This circuitous system of computers and electronic appliances all functioning towards our satisfaction and minimising effort presents us with something like a fallen, mechanised descendent of the 'for-the-sake-of-which' structure that organises our being-in-the-world. *Dasein*'s world would, in the name of comfort and efficiency, shrink to the particular network of electronic devices contained in the home. Thus familiar warnings about the dehumanising or alienating effects of technology would seem to be borne out by our being reduced to this primordial state of which Freud speaks. What is more, the standard paranoid question concerning our relationship to technology – 'who is controlling whom' – is intensified here. It all works for the satisfaction of our needs, but only by plugging *us* into the network and making us, as it were, the mainframe of the system. To indulge in a touch of hyperbolic fantasy, it seems almost like a step on the way to the predicament in which the human race finds itself in the 1999 film *The Matrix*, where they are merely the organic resources for a vast machine. This is the same shifting of coordinates in the advancement of new technology that we touched upon in the first chapter, and which Žižek equates to the Hegelian negation of negation, but pushed to the limit: technology, whose sole basic purpose is to make our lives

easier, becomes the end rather than the means, such that it is *we* who are ensuring the smooth running of the system to which we are now the slaves.[20]

Furthermore, ready access to neuroimaging technology would seem to remodel subjectivity and the human mind according to the template of a computer harddrive. At the Wellcome Trust Centre for Neuroimaging, at University College London, a number of trials have taken place using functional magnetic resonance imaging to access the memories of test subjects. In one such test in 2009,[21] volunteers wore virtual reality headsets and then were told to make their way through a specially constructed virtual environment, while having their brain activity monitored. They were subsequently scanned as they were asked to recollect a random location in the environment and the scientists were able to accurately predict the spatial position that the subject was picturing. In another test in 2010,[22] ten subjects were asked to watch three film clips each lasting seven seconds, and each showing an actress performing a different activity. Once again the subjects' brains were scanned as they recollected as vividly as possible a specific film clip and the computer program was able to identify the brain activity corresponding to each of the three films, which, somewhat surprisingly, was almost identical in each test subject. Although all such research is still at a very early stage, as it develops in accuracy it could transform the very act of recollection so that it becomes more and more like searching through a computer database. So not only would I no longer need to physically leave my station to change the television channel or pour myself a drink,

[20] As Samuel Butler predicted, when this 'state of things shall have arrived [...] man will have become to the machine what the horse and dog are to man.' 'Darwin Among the Machines', *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler*, arr. and ed. Henry Festing Jones (London: A.C. Fifield, 1913) p. 45.
[21] D. Hassabis, et al, 'Decoding Neuronal Ensembles in the Human Hippocampus', *Current Biology* 19, no. 7 (2009): pp. 546-554.
[22] M.J. Chadwick et al, 'Decoding individual episodic memory traces in the human hippocampus', *Current Biology* 20, no. 6 (2010): pp. 544-547.

I would not even need to 'manually' bring to mind facts, names, or other items of knowledge. It would all be stored in the brain and merely the *intention* to summon up a memory would be enough to prompt the computer to search through my psychical archive. Thus, just as the internet has been able to quickly settle disputes over facts and trivia, perhaps at some point we will be able to scroll through our subjective store of memories to put an end to disagreements in recollection between friends or relatives over personal matters that concerned only those involved.[23]

Freud repeatedly insists that once something has been registered in the unconscious those traces are 'indestructible' and that 'in the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten.'[24] Forgetting or falsification is therefore due to repression, whether the forgotten event itself is too distressing or unpalatable or, in itself perfectly innocent and mundane, it has come to be associated with some aspect of ourselves that has been disavowed. The trace of the original trauma, however, is permanently registered in the unconscious and may seek to find expression in a dream, but to do so it must disguise itself. In the case of the forgetting or distortion of dreams upon waking, this is an extension of the stage of censorship Freud calls 'secondary revision', the process that re-works the dream's content into a more acceptable form. There is therefore nothing arbitrary or

[23] Many scientists and popular science writers, such as Ray Kurzweil and Michio Kaku, predict the future integration of non-biological intelligence, e.g. memory chips, into the brain to enhance our cognitive capability (a possibility hyperbolically satirised in the third of Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* series, titled 'The Entire History of You', aired on Channel 4, 18.12.11.) See Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Penguin, 2005.) Furthermore, the increasing practice of 'lifelogging' is yet another example of technologically augmenting our finite memory. Using a combination of compact cameras primed to take photographs at roughly 30 second intervals, GPS tracking, sound recording devices, typed notes, etc., practitioners aim to create a digital archive that will record their entire life, both as a supplement to one's own memory and as a gift to posterity. One such 'lifelogger' declares that this 'total-recall technology' will 'change what it means to be human' (Simon Cox, 'Memories are made of disks', *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 11.11.11), although both aspects of this claim will be rendered questionable in our subsequent enquiries.

[24] Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 577.

happenstance about it and the psychoanalyst aims to trace the chain of associations back from the misshapen form in which it is remembered to the actual dream material, and eventually from there to the latent dream thoughts of which the manifest form is a cipher. However, this process of reconstruction would be rendered redundant by a dream-imaging mechanism that could simply display the dream as it occurred. This shift would be equivalent to that which has taken place in police work with the increasing ubiquity of CCTV cameras replacing the previous reliance on the memories of eye-witnesses. These psychical surveillance cameras would allow the thoughts to escape the subsequent revision, putting us in the uncanny situation of viewing an objective recording of something that took place inside our own mind, but of which we have no recollection. This would be a digital return of the repressed, the re-appearance of a traumatic excess we believed we had been cleansed of. We are straying into rather fanciful, speculative territory here, but the fundamental point to bear in mind is that the limitations of our own flawed, unreliable memory are perhaps on the verge of being supplemented by a technological system of total recall.

In the 'Note Upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad"', Freud describes a written reminder, such as a note in a diary or a shopping list, as 'a materialised portion of my mnemic apparatus, which I otherwise carry about with me invisible.'[25] As he goes on to write,

> All the forms of auxiliary apparatus which we have invented for the improvement or intensification of our sensory functions are built on the

[25] 'A Note Upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad"', 1925 (Standard Ed. 19) p. 227.

> same model as the sense organs themselves or portions of them: for instance, spectacles, photographic cameras, ear-trumpets. Measured by this standard, devices to aid our memory seem particularly imperfect.[26]

The occasion for this remark, and for the essay itself, is the then-recent appearance on the market of a child's writing toy which corresponds markedly with Freud's account of the structure of the perceptual function of the psychical apparatus: the 'Mystic Writing-Pad' (or *Wunderblock*) of the title. This is an early version of something like an 'Etch-A-Sketch' or 'Magna Doodle', where one writes with a stylus on a plastic sheet, which is registered beneath on a piece of waxed paper adhering to a slab of soft brown resin. The marks are erased by raising the sheet of paper from the layer beneath, but since the resin retains all of the previous traces even while they are not visible on the piece of paper, Freud sees in this a fitting representation of the way mnemic traces are permanently registered in the unconscious. The outer plastic sheet, meanwhile, is the receptive perceptual system, which acts as a protective cover for the layer that actually receives the stimuli: the paper on which the writing appears. It is on this layer that consciousness takes place and the fixing of the paper to the resin and then its peeling away corresponds to the sending out and withdrawal of cathectic innervations to the perceptual stimuli. So instead of the external stimulus making the impressions, as is the case with the stylus on the writing-pad, it is the internal cathectic energy which 'writes' what it receives.

[26] Ibid., p. 228.

It goes without saying that had Freud had access to current technology his choice of illustration of the perceptual and mnemic apparatus would have been very different; instead of the Mystic Pad it would perhaps have been the iPad. The interactive touch-screen surface is equivalent to the protective external shield against stimuli, the processor interpreting the information would be the receptive layer which actually receives and registers the input, and the opening and closing of files would be the arising and passing away of consciousness from the mnemic traces. And of course the 'unconscious' storage capacity of computers now exceeds even that of the human mind, and unlike the impressions left in the layer of resin, they can be brought back unaltered to 'consciousness' at any time. As Freud puts it, 'once the writing has been erased, the Mystic Pad cannot "reproduce" it from within; it would be a mystic pad indeed if, like our memory, it could accomplish that.'[27] To push the analogy a step further: even when we think we have permanently deleted files from the harddrive they are still traceable and able to be recovered by an expert, just as wholly forgotten, repressed memories can supposedly be retrieved by the psychoanalyst. The pertinent question, to which we will return, is whether such an advance in sophistication of the external representational model would actually alter not only the theory – psychoanalysis – but in fact the very 'object' of that theory – the psyche itself.[28]

Freud suggests that the primary function of cultural and technological development is to cultivate and customise the natural world such that it is more serviceable to our needs. The first acts of civilisation, according to Freud, were the fashioning and

[27] Ibid., p. 230.
[28] For further discussion of Freud's relationship with technology see Thomas Elsaesser's 'Freud and the Technical Media: The Enduring Magic of the *Wunderblock*', in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, ed. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) pp. 95-115.

manipulation of tools, the mastery of fire, and the building of dwellings. These 'opened up paths which man has followed ever since, and the stimulus to which is easily guessed. With every tool man is perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory, or is removing the limits to their functioning.'[29] Freud proceeds to list a series of cultural acquisitions in order to demonstrate their role as prosthesis to biological functions: motor or hydraulic power is modelled after man's muscles, new forms of transportation extend his movements over land, sea and air, telephony allows for the voice to traverse great distances, home building is a substitute for the mother's womb, telescopic and microscopic lenses allow us to surpass the limits of our retinal structure, and the photograph and phonograph retain fleeting visual and auditory impressions, both being 'at bottom materialisations of the power he possesses of recollection, his memory.'[30] We could of course add many things to this list that were unknown to Freud, but the point is that all of these developments essentially arise in response to finitude and their implicit aim is that of bringing us closer towards the perfection that we attribute to the supreme being:

> Long ago [man] formed an ideal conception of omnipotence and omniscience which he embodied in his gods. To these gods he attributed everything that seemed unattainable to his wishes, or that was forbidden to him. One may say, therefore, that these gods were cultural ideals. Today he has come very close to the attainment of this ideal, he has almost become a god himself. […] *Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God*. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on him and they still give him much trouble at times.

[29] *Civilisation and its Discontents*, p. 90.
[30] Ibid., p. 91.

> […] *Future ages will bring with them new and probably unimaginably great advances in this field of civilisation and will increase man's likeness to God still more.*[31]

We saw at length in the previous chapter how brain-computer interfacing and neuroimaging systems are implicitly modelled after the divine ideal of intellectual intuition, whether or not this is actually attainable. But if indeed the unconscious mind retains every impression it receives, and that as fMRI brain scanning technology develops there will be the capacity to retrieve even unconscious memories, would we consequently find ourselves with a derived faculty of total recall? Would a technology that had access to all of our deepest thoughts and memories supplement the lack in the functioning of our own memory such as to add one more organ to the prosthetic God that man is fast in the process of becoming?

However, as Derrida contends in his earliest encounter with Freud and his famed *Wunderblock*, this question concerning the 'status of the "materialised" supplement which is necessary to the alleged spontaneity of memory'[32] is never examined by Freud. Derrida reminds us that one should not disregard the materiality of the interface, as if it were a vanishing mediator, nor should we forget its supplementary status, 'which, moreover, could not act on a perfectly spontaneous memory',[33] coming to complicate the distinction between 'live' internal memory and the 'dead'

[31] Ibid., pp. 91-2. [Italics added.]
[32] Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London & New York: Routledge, 2001) p. 286.
[33] Ibid.

external memory aid. Rather than death distinct from and opposed to life, it is an economy of death within life, within the psychical system.[34]

The notion of an external hypomnemic device enabling us to 'overcome' the finitude of our memory is, for Derrida, intrinsically contradictory. The very fact that these devices are needed, called for, or conceivable at all merely bears witness to our essential finitude. If our memory were not finite then the notion of external memory aids, storage devices, cognitive imaging, would be entirely redundant. 'Prosthetic god', therefore, is an oxymoron, since supplementarity is finitude itself. Even if we were to suppose that, as Freud says, nothing is ever forgotten in the unconscious (a claim to which we shall return), and even if these processes were conceivably to advance to such a stage that any thought whatever could be accessed as digital information and nothing would ever be lost, it would still have no *meaning* for the subject concerned. This would not be *my* memory; if it is plucked from the recesses of my brain but I have no conscious recollection of it, it would merely be one more fact like any other. It would have the exact same status as a photograph of a childhood scene of which I have no recollection: evidence, surely, of its having taken place, but no meaningful associations would accompany it.[35]

[34] A lengthy analysis of Derrida's readings of Freud's 'Note' and the account there given of technology as irreducible substrate, rather than dispensable adjunct, to unconscious memory is provided by Patricia T. Clough in her *Autoaffection: Unconscious Thought in the Age of Teletechnology* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000)

[35] Avital Ronell, in her essay 'TraumaTV: Twelve Steps Beyond the Pleasure Principle', describes the inextricable alternation between hypermnesia and amnesia. Referring to the film *Total Recall* (Dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1990), where video implants prompt acts of memory, she writes that these implants 'somehow remain external to the subject who needs these prompters to supplement an absence of memory. The image comes to infuse an amnesiac subject. "Total Recall" is not the same as memory or recollection, and it is only total to the extent that it names the need for a prosthetic technology that would produce a memory track.' Avital Ronell, *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) p. 327.

Suggesting that a technological device could fulfil or perfect our system of memory would be to tacitly assume that, in itself, that system is complete and undivided, although scattered and dispersed across different psychical localities. According to this assumption, the device would gather together all those parts to reconstruct the 'original' image, effacing itself in the process. But this return does not take place, cannot take place, without a certain loss; it would always be the laying of a *new* mnemic trace which could never just follow the same path as the 'first' one. The past that we experience in memory is a production, a rewriting, not the straightforward recurrence of a past present; memory 'produces the present past.'[36] There was nothing before the reconstruction, for even what we would want to call the 'original' perception itself is reconstituted, and 'may only be read in the past, beneath perception and after it.'[37] Freud insists on the frequency with which a powerfully vivid memory from early childhood was only understood and configured as a traumatic event in retrospect, long after it took place (the phenomenon known as *Nachträglichkeit* or deferred action.) If, like the famous case of the 'Wolf-Man' for instance, a patient remembers witnessing sexual intercourse between his parents as a very young child, that event may only have come to acquire significance in subsequent years, when the subject reaches sexual maturity, thus rewriting the past.[38] The chain of causality is thereby complicated, for it is not the original event that triggers the later neurotic episode, rather it is subsequent events which retroactively constitute this early memory as the cause of a later complex. Perception, then, will always *have happened*, in the past. As Derrida puts it, 'pure perception does not exist: we are written only as we write, by

[36] Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', p. 269.
[37] Ibid., p. 282.
[38] See *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*, 1918 [1914] (Standard Ed. 17) pp. 7-122. It should be noted that Freud speaks of the 'activation' of the scene rather than its 'recollection.' p. 44.

the agency within us which always already keeps watch over perception, be it internal or external.'[39]

Freud asserts that the formation of memory traces has nothing at all to do with the quality of consciousness, 'indeed they are often most powerful and most enduring when the process which left them behind was one which never entered consciousness.'[40] Consequently we can be left with powerful unconscious memories of events that were never consciously experienced in the first instance. There is thus a resultant blurring of the distinction between memory and unconscious fantasy, with no clear means of determining one from the other, since fantasies have a reality of their own. This 'reality' may only be psychical as opposed to physical but it is precisely the psychical which holds more weight here. A fantasmatic invention can be so powerful and convincing as to carry exactly the same psychical consequences as an 'actual' memory.

The unconscious, as Derrida reads it, is not some 'other place', an indestructible repository of memory, like a basement where things are stored that are not suitable to appear in the open but which make their presence felt and occasionally rise to the surface. This would be to treat it as if it were a *virtual* or *latent* consciousness, which just happens to be concealed and hidden out of sight. Rather, on Derrida's interpretation, it is that forever escaping loss which cannot be captured or mastered and which divides and thwarts in advance the presence to self of consciousness.[41] The technological supplement, therefore, no matter how advanced it may become,

[39] Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', p. 285.
[40] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 25.
[41] 'A certain alterity – to which Freud gives the metaphysical name of the unconscious – is definitively exempt from every process of presentation by means of which we would call upon it to show itself in person.' Derrida, 'Différance', *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 20.

however deep it may probe, will never saturate the whole scene. There will always be a face that is turned away and this face *is* the unconscious according to Derrida. The logic of supplementarity means that *another* supplement is always required; the sequence is never complete.

These considerations demand that we revisit our earlier discussion of Croce's model of artistic creation and re-raise the question of the status of the art object within this system. There we saw that 'the aesthetic stage is completely over and done with' when an internal intuition has been formulated, when an image, turn of phrase or melody has been conceived; '*there is no need for anything else*' [my emphasis.] And the fact that the artist does subsequently paint, sing, write, play that which has already found expression *within*, so that it can take on physical existence and be encountered by others, 'all this is something additional.' To repeat:

> [It] is customary to distinguish between the work of art which exists inside us and that which exists in the outside world: this way of speaking seems infelicitous to us, since the work of art (the aesthetic work) is always internal; and what is called the external work is no longer the work of art.

In Derrida's terminology, then, Croce sees the artwork as a hypomnemic supplement to an already full and self-sufficient intuition. This secondary accessory is merely there to enable the full return, on the part of the viewer, to this prior intuition. However, we need only take a citation from Croce himself in order to undermine this simple distinction between internal intuition and external memory-aid. Once again, it is one that we have already examined, where Croce addresses

potential objections to his theory of physical beauty as mere aid to the reproduction of internal beauty. Here he concedes that artists sometimes start to work *before* completely conceiving the piece, in which case they will 'make brushstrokes, not to externalise their expressions (which do not then exist), but as if to try out and to have a simple point of support for their internal meditations and contemplations.' But this ever-present possibility for the external act of painting to influence and support the purely 'internal meditations' already compromises and corrupts the purity that Croce is concerned to maintain, introducing an economy of forces to the ostensibly autonomous intuition.

As we saw, expression is not external or subsequent to the 'idea', coming *later* to transmit a fully worked out thought. The idea is itself embodied and expression is involved from the outset. So if, as Raymond Scott suggested, technology will eventually allow the artistic process to evolve into thought transference from artist to receiver, we would not be dealing with a completely distilled but otherwise unchanged artistic expression – the same essence more expediently communicated. This new mode of transmission would already have come to modify the transmissible content. In plain terms, if a composer/musician no longer needed to work through his or her ideas on an instrument but could simply 'think' it, the 'musical thought' itself would be transformed.

As Derrida writes in his *Archive Fever*,

> [The] technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence

> and in its relationship to the future. The archivisation produces as much as it records the event.[42]

For example, the vast increases in storage capacity granted by computing technology does not only affect the *way* we store the material, enabling us to store more and more to the point that nothing at all need be discarded, but this very shift in attitudes affects the material itself. Much has been made in the music press over the last three decades of the seismic shifts in the production and reception of music accompanying changes of media. In the CD era the average length of a recorded album became significantly increased due to the CD format allowing for almost double the length of a vinyl LP. And now, due to the ubiquity of MP3 players, the full-length album itself is threatened, as listening habits incline more and more towards individual songs. As a result of the vast data capacities of MP3 players, music becomes more disposable and attention spans shorten. Thus the medium dictates the content, or, in the name of a recent book by J. Hillis Miller, the medium is the maker. All of these media are of course artificial constructs which became naturalised over time, but the sheer speed of change over the last twenty years is what has focused attention more than ever onto the medium and its effects on the material we listen to and the way we listen to it. As Derrida again puts it,

> [The] said archival technology no longer determines, will never have determined, merely the moment of the conservational recording, but rather

[42] *Archive Fever*, p. 17.

> the very institution of the archivable event. […] What] is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way.[43]

Above we raised the question as to whether subsequent technological advances, light-years beyond the 'Mystic Writing-Pad', would have transformed not merely Freud's choice of representational *model,* indeed not only the development of the *theory* that the model was employed to illustrate, but the very *psychical apparatus* that theory itself systematises. As Derrida asks,

> Is the psychic apparatus *better represented* or is it *affected differently* by all the technical mechanisms for archivisation and for reproduction, for prostheses of so-called live memory, for simulacrums of living things which already are, and will increasingly be, more refined, complicated, powerful than the 'mystic pad' (microcomputing, electronisation, computerisation, etc.)?
>
> Neither of these hypotheses can be reduced to the other. Because if the upheavals in progress affected the very structures of the psychic apparatus, for example in their spatial architecture and in their economy of speed, in their processing of spacing and of temporalisation, it would be a question no longer of simple continuous progress in representation, in the *representative* value of the model, but rather of an entirely different logic.[44]

Due to the cornucopia of internet enabled portable digital devices, we need no longer rely on our fallible memory to the same extent, nor need we use mental

[43] Ibid., p. 18.
[44] Ibid., p. 15.

arithmetic or know how to spell, since it is all done automatically. So in terms of personal organisers for example, using a tablet computer is not merely more efficient than writing in a diary or notebook, with added features, but otherwise exactly the same in principle. This increased efficiency – practically unlimited storage, copy and paste functions, the setting of alarmed reminders, Internet access, etc. – actually affects the way our memory operates.[45] Similarly, sending an email or SMS text message is not simply the same as writing a letter but quicker, instantaneous in fact; this would be to ignore the effect that instantaneity has on the content of the message, on the way we communicate. As J. Hillis Miller in the above-mentioned book puts it, '[a] given medium is not the passive carrier of information. A medium actively changes what can be said and done by its means.'[46]

Our very perceptual apparatus, the way we experience time and negotiate space is affected by these changes in archival technology. In the case of the former, the passage of time has exponentially accelerated such that we become ever more intolerant of activities that require our patience. The rate at which digital technology is rendered obsolete and radically new capabilities become naturalised and commonplace (to the extent that it almost instantly becomes impossible to recall how we previously coped without them), has caused the space of a few years

[45] Claude Lévi-Strauss noted the 'staggering capacity for remembering' exhibited in societies that had not developed writing (*Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, Ed. G. Charbonnier, Cape, 1969 p. 26), meanwhile recent studies have shown that a reliance on Internet search engines has led to a lower capacity for retention: the knowledge that a piece of information can be retrieved as and when required means that we no longer need to retain facts to the same extent. Cf. John Bohannon, 'Searching for the Google Effect on Peoples' Memory', *Science* 333, no. 6040 (2011): p. 277. Of course this need not necessarily be read negatively, for just as one could argue that it leads to increased mental indolence and an unhealthy reliance on technology (not to mention the unreliability of much online information), so we could equally celebrate the fact that our memory has been freed from the necessity of remembering trivial facts.

[46] J. Hillis Miller, *The Medium is the Maker: Browning, Freud, Derrida and the New Telepathic Ecotechnologies* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2009) p. 22. Consider also the effect of constant 'Microblogging' or 'status updating' on the way a life is lived. Rather than being a merely passive receptacle for the recording of experiences, the archiving technique once again transforms that which it records.

to seem more like decades.[47] In the case of the latter, perhaps the most obvious example is the use of satellite navigational systems in mobile devices, allowing us to follow on-screen our own progress towards a desired location as if seeing ourselves from above. However, these are not necessarily mere superficial, habitual changes of thought patterns. According to some cognitive neuroscientists and writers, whom Derrida anticipates by more than a decade, new media, and overwhelmingly the Internet, is actually in the process of rewiring our neural circuitry.[48] Our brains have an extraordinary plasticity and capacity for adaptation, and since the neuronal structure of an illiterate person's brain is demonstrably different from that of someone who can read, it is reasonable to assume that changes in patterns of consumption lead to real changes in the parts of the brain that process such information, increasing in efficiency while perhaps lowering our capacity for extended periods of concentration.[49]

It is yet to be seen what effect, if any, neurotechnologies – where the same cognitive functions which previously only *think* of an action actually *produce* that action, and where our thoughts or phenomenological experiences can be instantly

[47] Ray Kurzweil calls this the law of accelerating returns. Since new technological developments provide the conditions for their successors, progress is exponential rather than linear. So as technology advances the rate at which it continues to advance increases in a multiplicative rather than additive fashion – with every technological advancement efficiency is improved and hence the speed of progress toward the *next* significant development increases. Thus, 'we won't experience one hundred years of technological advance in the twenty-first century; we will witness on the order of twenty thousand years of progress (again, when measured by *today's* rate of progress), or about one thousand times greater than what was achieved in the twentieth century.' Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, p. 11. This exponential rate of increase, according to Kurzweil, itself continues to increase exponentially until we reach the 'Singularity': the period at which self-improving artificial intelligence machines outstrip human capabilities, causing the pace of technological change to become unimaginably rapid, thus radically transforming the human species and reality itself.

[48] A well-known recent example is Nicholas Carr's book *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010.)

[49] Susan Greenfield of Oxford University even suggests that what she terms 'mind change' as a result of such technology as video games and the Internet could well be second only to climate change in terms of the threat it poses to humanity. Ian Sample, 'Oxford Scientist Calls For Research on Technology "Mind Change"', *The Guardian*, 14.09.10.

externalised – will have on the functioning of our brain, but to return to a theme we discussed earlier, our capacity to carry out reality testing, to distinguish between an internal presentation and a real object, is surely compromised. As Freud describes it,

> The other sort of decision made by the function of judgement – as to the real existence of something of which there is a presentation (reality-testing) – is a concern of the definitive reality-ego, which develops out of the initial pleasure-ego. It is now no longer a question of whether what has been perceived (a thing) shall be taken into the ego or not, but of whether something which is in the ego as a presentation can be rediscovered in perception (reality) as well. It is, we see, once more a question of *external* and *internal*. What is unreal, merely a presentation and subjective, is only internal; what is real is also there outside.[50]

Evidently these distinctions between what is real as opposed to unreal, subjective as opposed to objective, and internal as opposed to external, are now more than ever problematised and rendered unclear. This is the same question as was addressed in the previous chapter under the rubric of possibility (corresponding to thought) and actuality (corresponding to material existence), although there we were concerned only with whether the blurring of this distinction constituted an overcoming of finitude; here it is more a question of the impact it would have on our psyche and even the functioning of our brains. What would the physical manifestation of a thought *do* to that thought and the one who bore it? For is not the immediate

[50] Freud, 'Negation', 1925 (Standard Ed. 19) p. 237.

fulfilment of wishes one of the chief examples Freud gives of the feeling of *das Unheimliche*?[51] Whenever an unlikely state of affairs that we wish or hope for actually comes about we are left with a sense of uneasiness rather than pleasure, as if strange, sinister forces are at work. The reason for this, Freud tells us, is that it recalls to us our childhood belief, since repudiated, in 'the omnipotence of thoughts'.[52] The 'unrestricted narcissism'[53] of this early stage of development, in which the reach of our mental processes is greatly overvalued, is subsequently displaced by reality. However, once again it appears that the increased potency granted to us by these technologies, rather than advancing the human race to some higher stage of development, would actually lead to a form of regression – in this case to a state of uninhibited primal narcissism.

Furthermore, what bearing would this have on the texture of our reality when '[our] whole relation to the external world, to reality, depends on our ability to distinguish [perceptions from ideas.]?'[54] A dream is described by Freud as being, among other things, 'an externalisation of an internal process',[55] so these processes may put at risk our ability to distinguish reality from dreaming, or hallucination. There is a name for the psychical disorder which leads to precisely this confusion; it is called 'amentia'. Amentia is the withdrawal from reality in the face of some loss or bereavement which the ego must deny since it finds it insupportable. 'With this turning away from reality, reality-testing is got rid of, the (unrepressed, completely

[51] 'In the story of "The Ring of Polycrates", the King of Egypt turns away in horror from his host, Polycrates, because he sees that his friend's every wish is at once fulfilled, his every care promptly removed by kindly fate. His host has become "uncanny" to him.' The Uncanny, 1919 (Standard Ed. 17) p. 239.
[52] Ibid., p. 240.
[53] Ibid.
[54] 'A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams', 1917 (Standard Ed. 14) p 231.
[55] Ibid., p. 223.

conscious) wishful phantasies are able to press forward into the system, and they are there regarded as a better reality.'[56] But just as a reversion to the state entirely in thrall to the pleasure principle paradoxically spells the end of pleasure, if the psychical floodgates are opened not only to such unrepressed intentional fantasies as we would consciously wish for, but to unconscious ones as well, those that we are not even aware that we hold, we may find this 'better reality' becoming more like a nightmare.

The Id-Machine

In Andrei Tarkovsky's 1979 film *Stalker* there is a prohibited, cordoned off landscape called the Zone, in which most of the film's action takes place, which has been affected by some unspecified event or occurrence, possibly a meteorite or extraterrestrial visitation, that has left it with strange, miraculous properties. Deep within this Zone is a room that is said to grant the deepest wishes of whoever enters it. The eponymous Stalker is an otherworldly guide who grants safe passage through the hazardous Zone, his two clients for the present trip referred to only as 'the writer' and 'the professor'. The writer is burned out, plagued by self-doubt and desperate to find out what he is really worth as an artist, visiting the Zone in the hope of finding inspiration and fulfilment. The professor, as we learn only towards the end of the film, has taken with him an explosive device, intending to destroy the room, for the greater good of mankind, fearing the outcome if the wrong person were to enter there and have their wishes fulfilled. The Stalker himself can never enter the room, only facilitate the entrance of others, for the Zone is said to punish

[56] Ibid., p. 233.

those who go there with ulterior motives. As a cautionary tale we are told of a previous Stalker named Porcupine who did step inside, leading his brother to his death on the way. He was made rich as a result but killed himself shortly after, supposedly out of guilt.

Near the end of the film, after their long, perilous expedition has reached its goal, both men find that they are unable to carry out what they journeyed there to do. The professor dismantles his device and the writer refuses to go inside. The latter refers to the story of Porcupine:

> Why do you think Porcupine hanged himself? Why didn't he come here again, not for money, but for his brother? In way of repenting. Because he realised that not just *any* wish comes true here, but only your *innermost* wish. Not what you would holler at the top of your voice. Coming true here is only what's in line with your nature, with your essence, of which you know nothing. But it's there, in you, directing you all your life […] It wasn't greed that had done Porcupine in, he was crawling in this puddle, begging to bring his brother back. But what he got was only money, and he couldn't get anything else, because render unto Porcupine the things that are Porcupine's! And things like conscience, anguish, they are just inventions. He realised that and hanged himself. I'm not going to your room. I have no wish to pour my filth over somebody's head. And then to put my neck into the noose, like Porcupine.

Having travelled all that way and standing on the threshold of gaining everything he ever wanted, the writer is afraid of just what will be revealed to him upon entering: what he *really* desires without knowing it, thus bringing him face to face with his ownmost truth. He understands that the Stalker Porcupine killed himself not out of guilt but through being unable to bear the knowledge of what was revealed to him about himself. Devastated over the death of his brother he would have entered the room wishing for him to be resurrected, only to be made fabulously rich instead, thus revealing himself to himself in his naked self-interest and avarice. Effectively what Porcupine *wanted* to want was to restore his brother to life, but what he *truly* wanted deep in his innermost psyche was riches. 'You dream of one thing but you get quite another', the writer says, because we are not who we think we are. The distressing conclusion is that we are ultimately selfish and callous and although we aspire to such ideals as compassion and conscience, we disavow it in our deepest thoughts; thoughts so deep that they are hidden even from ourselves. What effect would it have on our lives were we to have to face up to these unpalatable tendencies within ourselves, which our conscious self would find abhorrent but which is nevertheless 'there, in you, directing you all your life'?

In Freud's *Fragment of a Case of Hysteria*, his young patient Dora is revealed to harbour powerful unconscious erotic feelings for her father's friend Herr K. but on the occasions when he makes sexual advances towards her she reacts violently and runs away. Why, Freud asks, would she fiercely reject that which she longs for the most? 'Neurotics are dominated by the opposition between reality and phantasy. If what they long for the most intensely in their phantasies is presented to them in

reality they none the less flee from it.'[57] (But as Freud says frequently, what goes for the neurotic goes for the healthy psyche as well; indeed 'we are *all* ill',[58] it is just a matter of degrees of intensity.) So that which we *most* desire is hidden from us, repressed, because we are simultaneously repelled by it, and its direct assumption would reveal too much about ourselves that we would prefer to keep hidden. Freud elsewhere states that we cannot subsist on reality alone and must rely also on 'auxiliary constructions'.[59] Fantasy supplements reality, in the process becoming so woven into its fabric that it is inextricable from it. To put the same point in Lacanian terms, fantasy structures our relation to reality, but we never have access to those fantasies for that very reason; doing so would tear the fabric of the reality that we have constructed. For Lacan it is not the case that we weave fantasies in order to escape from 'harsh reality', rather it is *reality* that allows us to escape the traumatic real of our deepest fantasies.[60]

To take a very familiar example by way of illustration, there are a number of free association psychological tests that aim to detect suppressed racial prejudice in the participants, even in those who consciously would find such thoughts repugnant; but the methodology of such tests can easily be queried and their results can hardly be said to be definitive. We could challenge the approach of such a 'one size fits all' psychological test much as we would criticize the inherent flaws in an I.Q. test and quite comfortably refuse to accept the verdict if it presents us with something disagreeable. However, it would be much harder to quarrel with the results of a

[57] *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, 1905 (Standard Ed. 7) p. 110.
[58] 'The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms', *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 1916-17 (Standard Ed. 16) p. 358.
[59] Ibid., p. 372.
[60] Cf., for example 'The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire', *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006) pp. 671-701.

specifically targeted brain scan. In a much-discussed study, the results of which were published in the journal *Nature Neuroscience* in late 2003,[61] scientists purported to identify subjects harbouring racial prejudice based on surges of neural activity in certain regions of the brain when looking at images of black faces. As with many such studies, the scientific community is not unanimous, and some have questioned the interpretation put on the results, but if we were just to take the principle of the research and accept that there were notionally a way of immediately and accurately identifying prejudicial attitudes through the activity of the brain, there would surely be no way for the subject to argue with the outcome. Matters become rather more categorical when we are dealing with objective neural processes, and no amount of insistence on the basis of having friends who are black would change the results. This would be the *real* of one's own attitudes towards racial difference.

Presuming that the subject was genuinely unaware that such attitudes were unconsciously harboured, this knowledge could not fail but have a profound effect on one's sense of self and one's intersubjective relations with people from different ethnic groups. But how are we to categorise these hidden, unconscious attitudes which we hold even against our better judgement and principles? It could not, strictly speaking, be called subjective, as in how something appears to the subject independently of how they really are, since the point is precisely that they do *not* appear to the subject this way, at least not knowingly. Even less is it objective, for it tells us nothing about how African-Caribbean people 'really' are independently of

[61] J. Richeson et al, 'An fMRI investigation of the impact of interracial contact on executive function', *Nature Neuroscience* 6, no. 12 (2003): pp. 1323-1328.

the knowing subject. Rather, they belong to 'that bizarre category' that Žižek, borrowing a phrase from Daniel Dennett, calls 'objectively subjective':

> When, for example, we claim that someone who is consciously well-disposed towards Jews nonetheless harbours profound anti-Semitic prejudices of which he is not consciously aware, are we not claiming that (insofar as these prejudices do not reflect the way Jews really are, but the way they appear to him) *he is not aware of how Jews really seem to him*? Or, to put the same paradox in a different way, the fundamental fantasy is constitutive of (our approach to) reality […] yet for that very reason, its direct assuming or actualisation cannot fail to give rise to catastrophic consequences […] As the common wisdom puts it, a nightmare is a dream come true.[62]

So the rupture brought about by the brain sciences delving into the neuronal activity behind the scenes of our conscious behaviour not only pertains to the standard materialist one between how things appear to us and how they 'really are' (what is known as the 'explanatory gap' – the impossibility of reconciling the phenomenal world with that described by physics.) It also relates to the even more radical, uncanny schism between the way things *seem* to appear to me and 'the way things "truly seem to me", although I never actually experience them in this way'.[63] For in the face of an eliminative materialism that purports to explain and demystify such 'ineffable' qualities as love or happiness, even consciousness itself, by showing the biochemical or neuronal processes responsible for them, I can always cling to my

[62] Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 170. [My italics.]
[63] Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 2008) p. 156.

subjective experience of it. The standard criticism of scientifico-philosophical attempts at providing a full account of consciousness is that the 'third-person' perspective of science can never account for or get to grips with my 'first-person' conscious experience. As a result it is never truly viewed as a threat to this experience, because no matter how much knowledge we acquire about the brain it can in no way be incorporated into our understanding of ourselves or subjectivised.

So in finding refuge against materialism in the realm of intimate subjective experience, we hold fast to the truth of what we *feel* as opposed to what we are told about the unknown neurobiological processes governing our behaviour. This latter has no more of an impact on how we experience ourselves than the knowledge that colour is 'really' electromagnetic radiation affects how we view a Mark Rothko painting. Even the strictest materialist, who denies the existence of consciousness as we know and understand it, nevertheless disavows this attitude in her everyday self-relating activity. So although in her work the philosopher may tirelessly endeavour to exorcise the spectre of the 'Cartesian theatre' (in Daniel Dennett's well-known phrase), unbeknownst to her perhaps that is precisely how consciousness *really* seems to her and must seem to her when she is not thinking about it and just going about her normal life. Similarly, many Christians believe that even the most militant atheist does not, could not, *really* believe that the soul will not persist after death, even if he *thinks* he does; in his everyday activity he betrays his unconscious fantasmatic belief that death is not really the end. [64]

[64] As Žižek puts it, regarding the Marxian theory of commodity fetishism, what the Marxist confronts the bourgeois subject with is this: '"You may think that the commodity appears to you as a simple embodiment of social relations […] but *this is not how things really seem to you* – in your social reality, by means of your participation in social exchange, you bear witness to the uncanny fact that a commodity really appears to you as a magical object endowed with special powers".' (Ibid.)

Thus what is at stake here is more radical because it specifically *does* threaten our fundamental subjective experience or sense of self. Once again, it is not simply a question of uncovering the objective chemical processes and physical structures lying behind what we experience, but rather one of revealing what we *really* think, see, experience as opposed to what we *think* we think, see, experience. Hence our sense of who we are, our feelings for and about our loved ones, our opinions and tastes are put in doubt. Indeed this is precisely what is at stake in Lacanian psychoanalysis, according to Žižek, in which 'I am deprived of even my most intimate "subjective" experience, the way things "really seem to me," that of the fundamental fantasy that constitutes and guarantees the kernel of my being, since I can never consciously experience it and assume it.'[65] This, for Žižek, is the status of the Freudian unconscious: the paradoxical notion of an '*inaccessible phenomenon*, not the objective mechanism which regulates my phenomenal experience'.[66] This decentring 'opens up a new domain of weird "asubjective phenomena," of appearances with no subject to whom they can appear: it is only here that the subject is "no longer a master in his own house" – in the house of his (self-) appearances themselves.'[67]

The prospect we are faced with as cognitive imaging technologies develop is that of the real-world existence of what Žižek calls the *Id-Machine*,[68] a familiar science-fiction device involving an alien intelligence or technology that gives substantial reality to our deepest unacknowledged desires and fantasies. Perhaps the finest

[65] Ibid., p. 157.
[66] Ibid., p. 158.
[67] Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 172.
[68] Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999) p. 301.

example of this in cinema is Tarkovsky's earlier science-fiction film, *Solaris* (1972), which takes place almost entirely on a space-station orbiting the planet of the film's title. Due to the strange powers that the planet exercises over the crew members, their inner thoughts, desires and wishes are materialised as solid entities. However, rather than bringing them joy or happiness, there is something horrifying and monstrous about these apparitions, sending all of the crew into emotional crises. In the case of the main character, a psychologist, his dead wife appears, manifesting his guilt-feelings over her suicide. Another filmic example of the Id-Machine, referred to by Žižek, appears in the 1997 Hollywood film *Sphere*, directed by Barry Levinson. It follows a group of scientists after the discovery of an enormous spaceship a thousand feet below the surface of the Pacific Ocean, containing a mysterious, perfectly formed metal sphere that can reach into one's mind and manifest all one's worst fears and nightmares. As Žižek puts it, 'the Sphere is nothing in itself – a pure medium, a perfect mirror that does not mirror/materialise reality but only the real of the subject's fundamental fantasies.'[69]

According to Žižek, there is a fundamental irreconcilability between our true desire and its articulation in a definite demand or plea, and so that which we truly desire is never actually announced in the explicit wish we were able to express. Consequently 'we never truly desire what we wish for or will – for that reason, there is nothing more horrible – more undesirable, precisely – than a Thing that inexorably actualises our true desire.'[70] As the Writer describes it in *Stalker*, this innermost desire or wish is 'not what you would holler at the top of your voice' but what would actually make you recoil with horror if it were presented to you. To use

[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., p. 302.

a rather well-worn example, it is like Dorian Gray confronting his hideously aged, decayed picture in the attic, like a mirror that reflects the truth of ourselves as opposed to who we like to think we are. But we would fail to recognise ourselves in this distorted reflection:

> Communication with the Thing [that otherness within ourselves that *is* ourselves] thus fails not because it is too alien, the harbinger of an Intellect infinitely surpassing our limited abilities, playing some perverse games with us whose rationale remains forever outside our grasp, but because it brings us too close to what, in ourselves, must remain at a distance if we are to sustain the consistency of our symbolic universe.[71]

The recognition or incorporation of this unbearable Thing could only come at the expense of our psychic well-being, our sense of who we are.

We must be careful, however, not to fall into the trap of suggesting that such repressed desires, tendencies and instincts that form the underside to consciousness constitute one's 'true self' as of the properties of some enduring essence – who we *secretly are*. If, to return to the earlier example, one was revealed by fMRI brain scan to bear hidden racial prejudices, this does not negate the efforts of what for simplicity's sake might be called one's 'moral self' to restrain and inhibit such feelings. Instincts or urges become repressed when there is a conflict of interest with other instincts, such that its satisfaction would 'cause pleasure in one place and

[71] Ibid.

unpleasure in another.'[72] What Freud calls *primal repression* is the first phase, 'which consists in the psychical (ideational) representative of the instinct being denied entrance into the conscious.'[73] This establishes a fixation, and the repressed ideational content 'persists unaltered from then onwards and the instinct remains attached to it.'[74] The second phase of repression affects all those processes and trains of thought that derive from or have developed an association with the object of this primal repression. In describing this process Freud's prose seems deliberately to flirt with the gothic imagery of novels such as Wilde's, for the primally repressed instinct is said to develop...

> with less interference and more profusely if it is withdrawn by repression from conscious influence. It proliferates in the dark, as it were, and takes on extreme forms of expression, which when they are translated and presented to the neurotic are not only bound to seem alien to him, but frighten him by giving him the picture of an extraordinary and dangerous strength of instinct. This deceptive strength of instinct is the result of an uninhibited development in phantasy and of the damming-up consequent on frustrated satisfaction.[75]

While it is seemingly safely hidden away, and as far as our conscious self is concerned has been dealt with and forgotten, it continues to grow in strength in the unconscious, drawing more and more thoughts and associations into its orbit. These can be violent sexual urges or hostile or libidinous feelings towards loved ones and

[72] 'Repression', 1915 (Standard Ed. 14) p. 147.
[73] Ibid., p. 148.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., p. 149.

parents, or other unpalatable emotions or desires. The systems set up to disguise and protect us from these repressed thoughts conspire to make them seem doubly alien to us, for as a result of this repression those hostile feelings can be turned around into compensatory feelings of love and devotion. So it can sometimes be the case that those we love or care for the most, *for that very reason*, are those towards whom we harbour the strongest feelings of hostility. While unsavoury revelations such as these are the central currency of psychoanalysis, it could be said that those who enter into analysis already feel some psychical conflict, and all the work of the analyst in overcoming resistance prepares them for what will be disclosed. The Id-Machine, however, would catch us unawares and unprepared, lacking the necessary tools to come to terms with it.

The difference, Freud suggests, between an unconscious and a conscious presentation is not that they are registered in different areas of the psyche, or different neural regions of the brain. Rather, it is that…

> the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the *thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it*, while the unconscious presentation is the *presentation of the thing alone*. The system *Ucs*. [Unconscious] contains the thing-cathexes of the objects, the first and true object-cathexes; the system *Pcs*. [Preconscious] comes about by this thing-presentation being hypercathected through being linked with the word-presentations corresponding to it. It is these hypercathexes, we may suppose, that bring about a higher psychical organisation and make it possible for the primary process to be succeeded by the secondary process which is dominant in the

> *Pcs*. Now, too, we are in a position to state precisely what it is that repression denies to the rejected presentation in the transference neuroses: what it denies to the presentation is translation into words which shall remain attached to the object. A presentation which is not put into words, or a psychical act which is not hypercathected, remains thereafter in the *Ucs*. in state of repression.[76]

It is these word-presentations that bring under control and domesticate unbearable thing-presentations, keeping them at a safe distance. As the totalitarian regime in Orwell's *1984* understood, when the word is withdrawn from a concept, we cannot think it. In cognitive science terms, it is generally thought to be the left hemisphere (LH) of the brain that is responsible for language functions – the right hemisphere (RH) can receive and act on information, but it takes LH to provide a conscious explanation of it. In split-brain patients, where the left and right hemispheres of the patient's brain have been severed from each other so that there is no communication between them, if information is given only to RH (through the left ear), for example 'raise your arm', the patient will carry it out but will not consciously know why, much like in hypnosis. If the patient's LH is then asked why he has done this he will invent an excuse to explain it, as much to himself as to the questioner: 'I was just… stretching my arm.'[77] Language thus makes sense of the world and of our own thoughts and actions, structuring our reality.

Unconscious processes never rise *directly* into consciousness; they are always mediated by the preconscious interposition of word-presentations. The work of

[76] 'The Unconscious', 1915 (Standard Ed. 14) p. 201-2 [Italics added.]
[77] Cf. Arne Dietrich, *Introduction to Consciousness*, pp. 109-17.

psychoanalysis purports to aid the activity of the preconscious by supplying intermediate links. Neuroimaging technologies, however, would possibly have the capability to summon up – directly – the unpresentable Thing itself, immediately presenting it like the Sphere or the sentient ocean on Solaris. Faced with this primally repressed presentation, but without either the work of analysis to prepare us for it or the word-presentations which have been denied it, we would lack the framework with which to understand and integrate it into our symbolic matrix. As Žižek suggests, it would potentially shatter our fantasmatic consistency – the narrative fictions we implicitly construct for ourselves in order to regulate our reality and to understand and keep in check our experiences and feelings, keeping at bay overly powerful stimuli. Žižek reads the attacking of the birds in the Hitchcock film as such a tear in the fabric of reality due to overly intense maternal incestuous energy.[78] The birds themselves are a symptom, materialisations of the mother's overbearing love for her son, Mitch, and her rage at the disturbance of their family unit by the arrival in the town of Melanie, Mitch's love interest. The symptom is always an unwelcome intrusion, caused by overly strong libidinal cathexis that can find no other outlet since its discharge has been blocked by the preconscious censor. So it is a *substitute* satisfaction, experienced as suffering, which alerts the ego to the presence of overly charged repressed contents. The Id-Machine would present us with mechanical symptomatic manifestations, but rather than a *surrogate* satisfaction, which still conceals that which it announces, it would perhaps bring to light the repressed material *itself*.

[78] *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, 2006 (Dir. Sophie Fiennes) Episode 1.

The Timeless Unconscious

Due to the withdrawal of language from unconscious processes, the latter are not only unpresentable but also on principle unknowable, since it is only through translation into consciousness, and consequent connection to word-presentations, that we can know them. And of course, as soon as it undergoes this transition and becomes known to our conscious self it is no longer what it was when it was unconscious (no longer carrying the same force or meaning.) Thus, like the Epicurean adage about the paradox of death, we will only be in a position to know it when we are no longer in a position to know it. Consciousness is for Freud a '*sense-organ for the perception of psychical qualities*',[79] and as in Kant's system sensible intuition is constitutively incapable of acquainting us with things as they are in themselves, so for Freud this applies also to internal perception:

> Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psychoanalysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are their object. Like the physical, the psychical is not necessarily in reality what it appears to be.[80]

Freud elsewhere calls the ego a 'frontier-creature', whose role is 'to mediate between the world and the id, to make the id pliable to the world and, by means of

[79] Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 615.
[80] 'The Unconscious', p. 171.

its muscular activity, to make the world fall in line with the wishes of the id.'[81] So this frontier is effectively the limit point between two unknowables;[82] but this is also the case for the trans-phenomenal *I* of pure apperception. The difference between internal and external for Kant is merely the difference between two ways of appearing: one of which we call inner sense, the other outer sense. Beyond this we can say nothing at all about what mind or matter may be in themselves and whether they are irreconcilable substances or two aspects of one substance as in Spinoza. So although this psychoanalytic finding is presented as an original contribution and an expansion on the Kantian system it still seems in truth to be within that system it purports to supplement.

Where Freud does in fact depart from Kant is in his somewhat puzzling assertion that the unconscious, like the thing in itself, is not only unknowable but is also *timeless*. References to this timelessness, that Freud calls 'a subject which would merit the most exhaustive treatment'[83] are scattered across his works, but without ever being given this exhaustive treatment it apparently demands. The earliest explicit reference occurs in 1901, in a footnote to the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*:

> When traces of memory are repressed they can be shown to have undergone no change over quite a long period. The unconscious is timeless anyway. The outstanding and most surprising character of psychic fixation is that all impressions are retained just as they were absorbed, and moreover are

[81] *The Ego and the Id*, 1923 (Standard Ed. 19) p. 56.
[82] Although Freud does add the somewhat 'Rumsfeldian' caveat that 'internal objects are less unknowable than the external world.' (Ibid.)
[83] *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 28.

> retained in all the forms they assumed in further developments, a relationship which cannot be explained by any comparison from another sphere. According to this theory, therefore, every earlier stage of any material contained in the memory would be available for recollection, even if its elements have all long since changed their original connotations for later ones.[84]

At this early stage it is essentially an expansion upon the thesis of the indestructibility of psychical traces that Freud announced one year earlier in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and which we touched upon above. There the unconscious effectively acts as a cryogenic vault, preserving and sustaining impressions, so that 'a humiliation that was experienced thirty years ago acts exactly like a fresh one'.[85] Rather than the problematic term 'timeless', a better word would perhaps be 'ageless', meaning the passage of time will neither erode nor alter the impressions. However here there is a significant addition: it is not only the *original* impression and the emotions that accompanied it that are retained but 'all the forms they assumed in further developments'. So every subsequent recollection of this humiliation, along with every new association or retroactive alteration that it later underwent is preserved alongside it, such that we can no longer speak of an 'original' impression.

Another significant reference occurs in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, nineteen years after *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, where Freud elucidates the

[84] *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2002) p. 265n.
[85] *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 578.

thesis slightly, apologising for the obscurity of his remarks, but once again declining to explicate further:

> As a result of certain psychoanalytic discoveries, we are today in a position to embark on a discussion of the Kantian theorem that time and space are 'necessary forms of thought'. We have learnt that unconscious mental processes are in themselves 'timeless'. This means in the first place that they are not ordered temporally, that time does not change them in any way and that the idea of time cannot be applied to them. These are negative characteristics which can only be clearly understood if a comparison is made with *conscious* mental processes. On the other hand, our abstract idea of time seems to be wholly derived from the method of working of the system Pcpt.-Cs. And to correspond to a perception on its own part of that method of working. This mode of functioning may perhaps constitute another way of providing a shield against stimuli. I know that these remarks must sound very obscure, but I must limit myself to these hints.[86]

So, as is touched upon here and later expanded upon slightly in the 'Note Upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad"', time, as we commonly know it, is a product of the perceptual system; it is a result of the periodic sending forth and withdrawal of cathectic innervations, likened by Freud to a sending out of 'feelers' towards the external world which withdraw as soon as they have felt or tasted the excitations that are there. As soon as this cathexis withdraws, consciousness withdraws along with it. The periodic fluctuations in the current of innervations, akin to a continuous

[86] *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 28.

writing and raising of the sheet on the Mystic Pad, is, according to Freud, the origin of our concept of time and temporal succession. However, what does Freud mean by suggesting that time itself acts as a further shield against stimuli? In *The Ego and the Id* the process of temporalisation is said to coincide with reality testing, so bestowing a temporal order upon an internal perception belongs to the same perceptual function as the assessment as to whether or not it is real.[87] Thus at the same time as we check whether a psychical image corresponds with objective reality we also assign it a place in time: if it no longer confronts us from the outside, it therefore belongs to the past and we can perhaps distance ourselves from it. Freud addresses this process by which we consign impressions to the past in 'The Dissection of the Psychical Personality' from the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, where he gives perhaps his most extensive treatment of the subject of timelessness, but once again accompanied by the regret that 'too little theoretical use' has been made of it:

> [We] perceive with surprise an exception to the philosophical theorem that space and time are necessary forms of our mental acts. There is nothing in the id that corresponds to the idea of time; there is no recognition of the passage of time, and – a thing that is most remarkable and awaits consideration in philosophical thought – no alteration in its mental processes is produced by the passage of time. Wishful impulses which have never passed beyond the id, but impressions too, which have been sunk into the id by repression, are virtually immortal; after the passage of decades they behave as though they have just occurred. They can only be recognised as

[87] *The Ego and the Id*, p. 55.

> belonging to the past, can only lose their importance and be deprived of their cathexis of energy, when they have been made conscious by the work of analysis[...] Again and again I have had the impression that we have made too little theoretical use of this fact[.][88]

So it is only by determining something as *past* – whether this be an impression or a wishful fantasy that has been registered but never acted upon – that it can be defused and its impact softened; otherwise it will continue to insist itself upon us. This corresponds with very interesting experimental clinical treatments for sufferers of post-traumatic stress disorder. In such cases the psychical imprint of a distressful event was so strong that the memory refuses to fade as time goes on, remaining exactly as potent as on the day it occurred. The treatment consists, over a course of weeks, of the patient being medicated with beta-blockers while mentally reliving the traumatic event. The drugs inhibit proteins in the connections between brain cells which reinforce the memory trace as it is recalled, inducing a toning down of the emotional colouring of the memory so that it is not forgotten altogether but allowed to become less intense, effectively consigning it to the past rather than constantly living it in the present.[89] In Freud's terms this deprives the memory of its cathexis of energy, but the result is chemically induced rather than analytically. This ability to edit our own past experiences, like an early prototype of the memory-erasing agency in Charlie Kaufman and Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), is yet another example of the brain sciences' increasing resemblance to science fiction.

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[88] *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p. 74.
[89] Cf. the documentary *Horizon: How Does Your Memory Work?* (Dir. Annabel Gillings, aired on BBC2, 25.3.08)

Both of the last two cited passages begin with a reference to Kant and the psychoanalytic discovery of an exception to the *a priori* conditions of sensibility, but is this really an *exception* to Kant's system and not rather a strange *addition*? Freud misrepresents Kant slightly in stating that time is a necessary form, first of 'thought' and then of our 'mental acts'. Rather, as we saw previously, time, for Kant, is the pure form of inner intuition and the condition of all that appears to us. For anything at all to appear, whether that be an external object or an internal process, it must take place upon this horizon. Furthermore we have just seen how Freud himself insists that as soon as the unconscious traces are made conscious they are assigned a place in time, for in order for us actually to perceive these processes they must be placed in some form of personal chronology. So for Freud too perception necessarily takes place under temporal conditions. And what is more, he also seems close to Kant in his assertion that time is a projection of the mental apparatus onto the things we perceive. Freud's addition is that psychical processes that are not being perceived are still active in the mind, and that time has no jurisdiction over them. We can have no possible notion of what form they may take while existing in this lawless, atemporal state because as soon as we are able to think them they are wrested out of it. Furthermore, all forms of description must rely on the notion of simultaneity, which itself is of course a temporal modality.

Where Freud further differs from Kant is that the activity of the perceptual apparatus is responsible not for time as such (transcendental ideality), but for our *abstract idea* of time, no doubt what Heidegger would call the *vulgar* concept of time: the calculation of divisible moments of some abstract time 'in which' events take place according to the linear succession of past – present – future, and centred

around the primacy of the *now*. In this sense perhaps as Derrida suggests we should read Freud the way Heidegger read Kant, and that 'the unconscious is no doubt timeless only from a certain vulgar conception of time.'[90] On such a reading the unconscious would not be *outside of time*, but rather outside of what Heidegger calls 'within-time-ness'. Derrida proposes that the question surrounding this supposed timelessness of the unconscious should be posed in relation to the aforementioned malleability of mnemic traces, exemplified by the potential for a previously innocuous event to take on traumatic proportions some years later. Because what we think of as 'the past' is not *set*, hard-coded into our psychic apparatus but forever being produced, altered and rewritten the time sequence is infinitely fluid and flexible. It would therefore be a mistake, based on metaphysical presumptions, to ask in what form such 'timeless' traces exist when they are outside consciousness.[91]

So Freud's thesis of the timelessness of the unconscious should perhaps not be seen as an exception to Kant's transcendental conditions of experience, and certainly not the site of something like an overcoming of the finite limits of subjectivity. For one thing Freud often insists that, like in Kant's account of the productive imagination, all the material that makes up the 'contents' of the unconscious is derived from experience, and so, in the eyes of a Kantian, still can be traced back to a sense impression which was subject to the transcendental conditions. This reliance on receptivity is precisely the impasse of finitude that we repeatedly encountered previously. However, in his later work Freud seems to violate this rule as he comes

[90] Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', p. 270.
[91] For a different perspective on Freud's treatment of time, temporality and the timelessness of the unconscious, see chapter two of Mary Ann Doane's *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 2002.)

to hold the view that traces remain in our psyche which cannot have been derived from a personal memory but are rather archaic vestiges which have expressed themselves in fantasy:

> I believe these *primal fantasies*, as I should like to call them […] are a phylogenetic endowment. In them the individual reaches beyond his own experience into primeval experience at points where his own experience has been too rudimentary. It seems to me quite possible that all the things that are told to us today in analysis as phantasy – the seduction of children, the inflaming of sexual excitement by observing parental intercourse, the threat of castration (or rather castration itself) – were once real occurrences in the primeval times of the human family, and that children in their phantasies are simply filling in the gaps in individual truth with prehistoric truth.[92]

This notion of psychic inheritance complicates matters somewhat, suggesting that in addition to the 'timeless' store of individual memories the unconscious also contains fantasmatic enactments of primordial experiences. So one's genetic memory stretches back far beyond the period of one's own life and the psyche is not the *tabula rasa* that we had assumed it to be. This would be a pre-personal experience that must by nature be distributed across all psyches since we all share the same ancestry. These 'primal fantasies' that Freud is compelled to assume, as he himself admits,[93] bear a striking, somewhat surprising, resemblance to the theory of the archetypes of the collective unconscious as propounded by Freud's most famous disciple turned apostate Carl Gustav Jung.

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[92] 'The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms', p. 371.
[93] Cf. *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*, p. 97.

The existence of a faculty of innate primordial images in every individual is a necessary presupposition, according to Jung, in order to account for the recurrence of myths, legends and religious symbolism in practically identical forms all over the world and throughout history. So when such images and symbols appear in fantasies and dreams we are no longer dealing with personal memories or experiences but with 'the deeper layer of the unconscious where the primordial images common to humanity lie sleeping.'[94] These ideas, motifs or symbols are given the name *archetypes* and this 'deeper layer' of the psyche is what Jung calls the *collective unconscious*. Jung thus distinguishes between the *personal* unconscious, which may indeed correspond to the Freudian (or Adlerian) descriptions, containing forgotten or repressed memories, traumas, fantasies and impulses which are unique to each subject, and the *impersonal* or *transpersonal* unconscious which is 'detached from anything personal and is entirely universal' and its 'contents can be found everywhere'.[95] This universal psychical substrate contains 'not only the residues of archaic, specifically human modes of functioning, but also the residues of functions from man's animal ancestry, whose duration in time was infinitely greater than the relatively brief epoch of specifically human existence.'[96] In which case our psychical archive is akin to geological sedimentation, and upon excavating our cognitive activity we could perhaps be uncovering a treasure trove of ideas, memories and behavioural patterns stretching back millennia.

[94] 'The Psychology of the Unconscious', 1943 (Collected Works, 7) p. 64-5.
[95] Ibid., p. 65.
[96] Ibid. p. 96-7.

So here we are faced with a model of the mind which, in contradistinction to that of Kant, seems to be made up of contents which transcend one's own personal experiences, presenting us with the possibility of a form of true spontaneous creation which is not solely reliant upon sensibly given data:

> Every creative man knows that spontaneity is the very essence of creative thought. Because the unconscious is not just a reactive mirror-reflection, but an independent, productive activity, its realm of experience is a self-contained world, having its own reality, of which we can say that it affects us as we affect it – precisely what we say about our experience of the external world.[97]

This appears to be a more romanticist account of creativity, with the artist as visionary, tapped into an eternal, universal truth and able to present it for us all to see and experience. Because this psychic substrate is common to the whole of humanity, sensitive viewers of the work immediately recognise it as if it offered some truth about themselves.

Jung sees the unconscious as essentially compensatory, developing as counterbalance to the ego out of neglected aspects of one's own personality. If, for example, we are excessively rational in our day to day lives, neglecting the irrational, passionate side of ourselves, this latter will not be quashed and conquered but will proliferate, becoming more and more autonomous the more it is neglected, leading to an imbalanced psyche which will eventually reach an impasse.

[97] 'The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious', 1945 (Collected Works, 7) p. 183.

It is at these moments, Jung says, that archetypal images most commonly force themselves upon the subject, offering a potential line of advance or release that she would never have conceived consciously. The first archetype to be encountered in every case is that which Jung calls the 'shadow'. This is how the other side to one's conscious self appears at first sight: dark, menacing and mysterious. It is only after a reckoning with this threshold figure that one passes on to further, deeper-lying archetypal experiences, although the specific nature of which – anima/animus, the wise old man, the trickster, etc. – need not concern us here. An encounter with the collective psyche is, says Jung, responsible for every variety of religious or spiritual conversion or vision, as well as abrupt mid-life changes of career or lifestyle. The archetypes are specially charged with psychic energy and their emergence in consciousness brings with it an overwhelming numinous affective resonance, inhibiting all other contents of consciousness. Initially, says Jung,

> [This] always feels like the end of the world, as though everything had tumbled back into original chaos. One feels delivered up, disoriented, like a rudderless ship that is abandoned to the moods of the elements. So at least it seems. In reality, however, one has fallen back upon the collective unconscious, which now takes over the leadership.[98]

Not every such encounter leads to this rewarding recalibration of one's life, however. In some cases it leads to a ruinous collapse and there is no way back to one's prior stability. Such events would perhaps be called a nervous breakdown or mid life crisis.

[98] Ibid., p. 161.

Nevertheless, in spite of its potential dangers it is only after a reckoning with the collective unconscious that we approach wholeness or 'come to selfhood', for the 'self' in Jung's terminology is the outcome of a struggle or an ongoing dialogue, not a given. What we are as a 'self' is superordinate to the conscious ego and it...

> transcends our powers of imagination to form a clear picture of [it], for in this operation the part would have to comprehend the whole. There is little hope of our ever being able to reach even approximate consciousness of the self, since however much we may make conscious there will always exist an indeterminate and indeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self.[99]

So *in itself* and in principle, the self is total and complete, but we will never consciously attain to this whole, since it infinitely exceeds our powers of reaching it.

This, then, could be said to be the nub of the subtle but crucial difference between the Freudian and Jungian models of the psyche, aside from more readily apparent factors such as the former's emphasis on the Oedipus complex and the latter's on the archetypes. We saw how on Derrida's reading the Freudian unconscious can never be exhausted because it is that which forever escapes our attempts at self-mastery, dividing one from oneself and precluding immediate presence to self. For Jung on the other hand the unconscious will never be exhausted because it carries

[99] Ibid., p. 175.

within it unfathomable depths which are essentially beyond our comprehension. So while with Freud the subject is barred from wholeness because of an irreducible subtraction or fissure, for Jung we are likewise denied wholeness because of an inexhaustible excess or overflow. Perhaps this would be the difference between a finite and an infinite model of the psyche.

We can obviously see from all of this that Jung would give a very different answer from Freud to the question of the 'oceanic'. Instead of being a remnant and intimation of the all-encompassing ego of early childhood this feeling of limitlessness would instead be the result of an encounter with the collective unconscious and an experience of the exponential surplus of the *self* over the ego. Everyone, no matter how well they know themselves, is capable of wider consciousness, since 'it is highly probable that we are still a long way from the summit of absolute consciousness.'[100] The Hegelian flavour of this latter passage is clear, but the sentiment is actually rather more Kantian, for Jung elsewhere says that 'no mortal mind can plumb the depths' of the collective unconscious. The most we can do is proceed according to 'the hypothetical "as if"',[101] which is an unmistakably Kantian formulation: an infinite striving towards a regulative ideal we know to be unattainable, nevertheless proceeding *as if* the sequence was complete in itself.

In spite of occasional terminological inconsistencies, which can lead to confusion, Jung draws a clear and unequivocal distinction between the archetypal *ideas* and the archetypes themselves, a distinction in fact corresponding very closely to the

[100] Ibid., p. 183.
[101] Ibid., p. 175.

Kantian division between phenomena and noumena. The term archetype applies exclusively to 'those psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration and are therefore an immediate datum of psychic experience.'[102] The archetypes *stricto sensu* are hypothetical and irrepresentable and we must only assume their existence from their effects and the way they are expressed in fantasmatic forms. Therefore the name archetype does not designate the myths, fables, fairytales or religious stories that are their conscious derivatives, and which already bear the trace of critical evaluation and distance. Nor does it refer to their 'immediate manifestation, as we encounter it in dreams and visions', which 'is much more individual, less understandable and more naïve than in myths'.[103] Their appearance in dreams, hallucinations or fantasy is a truer representation than in myths and religious stories, which have become hardened into dogma over time, but they are still manifestations, and as such not the archetypes *themselves*. 'The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear.'[104] The archetypes in themselves are the same in every subject but the form or manner in which they appear is constituted and shaped by the personal history and circumstances of the subject, although generally proceeding according to familiar patterns.

There is thus a clear, although implicit, correspondence between the archetypes and the Kantian rational ideas, which govern our moral behaviour. As we saw in our previous chapter, these ideas of reason are not subject to temporal conditions, but are fixed and unchanging; all that is variable are the particular circumstances in

[102] 'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious', p. 5.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

which they make their appearance. They determine our actions only indirectly, via the categorical imperative, since immediate, direct access is constitutively denied to us. Likewise, the archetypes are timeless, inborn and sensuously unconditioned, however unlike the ideas of reason they are dynamic rather than fixed and *non-rational*. However, just as we have practical but not theoretical proof of freedom and the other supersensible ideas, so we have pragmatic proof of the archetypes without our being able to encounter them directly. Indeed were we to do so the consequences would no doubt be as catastrophic for our psyche as immediate access to the noumenal dimension was said to be. Gazing straight into this abyss would overwhelm and engulf our individual ego, obliterating us as a result.

Perhaps an even closer Kantian parallel is with the early parodical work *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, in which Kant allows himself, in an ironic fashion, to speculate upon that which is beyond the bounds of human experience and knowledge. Here, through a satirical reading of the work of Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg (more of whom later), Kant posits in addition to the material world an *immaterial*, or spirit world, which is a whole self-subsisting realm, 'its parts in mutual conjunction and intercourse without the instrumentality of anything corporeal.'[105] The human soul is said to be conjoined in the two worlds at the same time, but so long as it is incarnated in a body it only *clearly* perceives the material world, having but a hazy intimation of the other side. As soon as the material body dies this link between the two territories is severed but the soul continues to exist in the spirit realm, unencumbered by materiality.

[105] *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, trans. E.F Goerwitz, Reprint Ed., (Indianapolis: Kessinger, 2003) p. 56.

This spirit world bears an obvious resemblance to the collective unconscious, which we likewise inhabit alongside our personal psyche without being clearly aware of it. Furthermore, Kant (still in a satirical register) suggests that there can be communion between the two worlds and spiritual ideas can...

> pass over into the personal consciousness of man, indeed, not immediately, but still in such a way that, according to the law of the association of ideas, they stir up those pictures which are related to them and awake analogous ideas of our senses. These, it is true, would not be spiritual conceptions themselves, but yet their symbols.[106]

What else is the archetypal idea other than a mediated, 'analogous idea of the senses' that acts as a symbol for the archetype itself?

We can now perhaps see that Jung's account of the artistic imagination, above, is closer to Kant's than it initially seemed. For, since these archetypes cannot be presented immediately by the artist but only indirectly evoked, this corresponds very closely with the Kantian model of aesthetic ideas, which allow the imagination to transgress the limits of all possible experience and present what it finds within a sensuous form. They evoke something universal and absolute, while manifesting it in an original and singular expression. Perhaps, then, between an archetypal idea and an aesthetic idea there is not such a disparity.

[106] Ibid., p. 69.

Not only is the collective unconscious 'the repository of man's experience' but 'at the same time the *prior condition of this experience*'.[107] So archetypes are not merely the effect and deposits of ancestral events but at the same time they are significant determinants of such events. They are therefore both cause and effect, the snake eating its own tail. As we mentioned above, the constellating of archetypal ideas in the unconscious takes place as compensation for neglected parts of the subject's psyche, so that when they build up an irresistible force they impose themselves on the life of the subject, forcing them in a certain direction so as to reorient their psychic balance. 'Perhaps – who knows? – these eternal images are what we mean by fate.'[108]

However, if no mortal mind can communicate with the archetypes immediately, could they hypothetically be accessed by computational neuroimaging technologies? Could we conceivably uncover these archetypal traces in their real, untouched form, bypassing the individual colouring given to them by the particular subject, and in doing so access an absolute truth? But as Jung repeatedly insists in the face of a recurring criticism, these archetypes are not inborn *ideas*, sitting within our collective psyche and waiting to be uncovered, since '[it] is not a question of inherited *ideas*, but of inherited *thought-patterns*.'[109] They are deep-structure psychic patterns leading to certain types of universal mental experience, and not innate ready-made seraphic visions of gods and harpies. We each have the same fundamental phylogenetic psychic inheritance, which is that which makes us human beings. The archetypes then are not just images lying deep within the unconscious of every person, in which case they could perhaps, speculatively

[107] 'The Psychology of the Unconscious', p. 93.
[108] Ibid., p. 107.
[109] 'The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious', p. 135. [My italics.]

speaking, be accessed by brain scan. Rather they are patterns of behaviour making their appearance 'only in the course of amplification'.[110] The therapeutic process Jung calls *active imagination* is the forcing or helping on its way of this course of amplification. In a manner very reminiscent of the lucid dreaming of the magician in Borges' *The Circular Ruins*, the subject delves into the unconscious psyche by way of active, spontaneous fantasy. On following these fantasmatic inventions where they lead of their own volition they invariably follow certain 'grooves' or psychic imprints, where archaic or mythological figures and motifs appear which betray their archetypal character. So they are not so much inborn, inherited ideas but rather the predisposition or propensity towards those ideas.

Synchronicity and the *Unus Mundus*

Jung equates the irrepresentable nature of the archetypes with the smallest particles that physics deals with, whose nature can only be known by their effects. In both cases the physicist or psychologist is attempting to define an objective order of nature whose behaviour is altered by the fact of its being observed and can at best build up a probable model/construction of how these quantities behave based on their observable effects. Now, in a situation where we have two entities or properties whose existence must be assumed but which cannot be represented or shown in person, 'there is', says Jung, 'always the possibility – which we tend to overlook – that it may not be a question of two or more factors but of one only':

[110] 'On the Nature of the Psyche' (Collected Works, 8) p. 205.

> The identity or non-identity of two irrepresentable quantities is something that cannot be proved. […] Since psyche and matter are contained in one and the same world, and moreover are in continuous contact with one another and ultimately rest on irrepresentable, transcendental factors, it is not only possible but fairly probable, even, that psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing.[111]

Jung uses the term '*psychoid*' (always as an adjective, never a substantive) to describe these irrepresentable psychophysical processes and this 'one and the same thing' which is neither psychic nor material in nature but prior to both, antecedent to their differentiation, is named, using the terminology of alchemy and Medieval philosophy, *unus mundus*, meaning 'one unitary world'. Jung felt this hypothesis to be far from the obscure mysticism it can appear to be at first sight, but to be a legitimate response to empirical data, informed by developments in particle physics. Indeed Jung developed this concept in collaboration with the Nobel Prize winning physicist and quantum pioneer Wolfgang Pauli (a relationship generally passed over in silence in physics circles, or excused as the individual eccentricities of a great man that has no bearing on his work.)

For Jung there are certain privileged events or experiences which manifest this irrepresentable unity of psyche and world and which carry profound and far-reaching implications. Such events are those statistical anomalies attributed to chance or coincidence which seem to fall outside of any known causality and so elude rational explanation. A classic example is the well-documented case of the

[111] Ibid., pp. 214-5.

above-mentioned spiritualist Emanuel Swedenborg's dramatic vision of the great fire of Stockholm in 1759 while he was dining in Gothenburg, 250 miles away. It was only two days later that reports from Stockholm confirming Swedenborg's vision, down to the smallest detail, reached them in Gothenburg. Another famous example is one of Jung's own, from his analytic experience. A young patient of his was describing a dream she had had in which she was given a golden scarab. In the middle of her account Jung noticed a tapping against the window of his practice and opened the window, through which flew a rose-chafer beetle, 'the nearest analogy to a golden scarab that one finds in our latitudes […], which contrary to its usual habits had evidently felt an urge to get into a dark room at this particular moment.'[112]

Although the two cases are very different in nature – for one thing the patient was not presenting her dream as if it were a prophetic vision – both are examples of the phenomenon Jung calls *Synchronicity*, defined as the 'coincidence of a psychic state with a corresponding objective process'.[113] More everyday, commonly experienced instances are unlikely meaningful coincidences, such as thinking of a friend from whom one has not heard in a long time immediately before receiving a telephone call from that same friend, or successions of chance events such as a number or word recurring again and again throughout the course of a day or number of days (a phenomenon Freud addresses in *The Uncanny*.)

Jung does not try to explain away such occurrences with rational accounts, which we are all well versed in providing, but takes them at face value, wishing to account

[112] *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (Collected Works, 8) p. 438.
[113] Ibid., p. 480.

for them on their own merits. However, since these are singular, anomalous occurrences they are on principle incapable of being premeditated and examined in controlled conditions, for the experimental method by nature aims at establishing regular, repeatable events and thus ruling out of consideration the unique or rare results which are put down to chance deviations. Causality, says Jung, is a *statistical* truth, not an absolute truth, and is only *generally* valid, when operating on the macrocosmic scale. 'In the realm of very small quantities *prediction* becomes uncertain, if not impossible, because very small quantities no longer behave in accordance with the known natural laws.'[114] So broadly speaking the course of nature can be unfailingly expected to follow the laws of causality, but when we are dealing with particular events on a micro scale we can never predict the outcome with complete certainty. Jung asserts, repeating an often-voiced limitation of the scientific procedure, that the answers given by nature in experimental practices are influenced by the questions asked, thus giving only a partial, statistical or average view of the natural world. So far, so relatively uncontroversial, but Jung draws from this the contentious conclusion that since causality is not a universal truth there must be connections of events which are *acausal*, and thus demanding another connecting principle to account for them.

However, discovering such a principle poses considerable problems, for how can one base a theory on '[absolutely] unique or ephemeral events whose existence we have no means of either denying or proving'?[115] We can only rely on anecdotal evidence, which is inherently unreliable. Furthermore, how are we to distinguish genuinely synchronistic or acausal events from mere chance? Much of Jung's

[114] Ibid., p. 421.
[115] Ibid., pp. 422-3.

evidential foundations rest on J.B. Rhine's famous parapsychic experiments which involve the experimenter turning up a series of cards with different geometrical patterns on them while the subject, who is separated by a screen, guesses the sign as each card is turned. In a significant number of cases the quantity of correct guesses exceeded to a highly improbable degree that which would be expected by chance. After the first set of experiments the distance between experimenter and subject was increased, even up to hundreds of miles, and much the same results were achieved. Yet more tests were done in which the subjects were told to predict the series of shapes in a set of cards that were only to be turned over in the future, and still the amount of correct guesses exceeded chance probability. Since evidently neither time nor space is an inhibitory factor over the results, Jung asserts that such phenomena can have nothing to do with the transmission of force, as the distance to be overcome would diminish its effects. What it points to in fact, Jung suggests, is a psychic relativity of time and space, and a 'psychic function or psychic condition'[116] that is capable of abolishing the time factor and the spatial factor.

What these experiments, as well as the events referred to above, demonstrate according to Jung, is that 'there are events which are related to one another […] *meaningfully*, without there being any possibility of proving that this relation is a causal one.'[117] So we are not dealing with a relation of cause and effect, but rather a 'falling together in time, a kind of simultaneity. Because of this factor of simultaneity, I have picked on the term "synchronicity" to designate a hypothetical factor equal in rank to causality as a principle of explanation.'[118] It is important to note the term *hypothetical*, and the sense that synchronicity does not constitute a

[116]Ibid., p. 433.
[117] Ibid., p. 435.
[118] Ibid.

positive addition to knowledge but rather a regulative model to help guide an explanation of seemingly unaccountable phenomena.

Like Freud, Jung refers to Kant's conditions of sensibility and suggests, albeit in a very different way to Freud, that these conditions do not hold in the unconscious. They are 'postulated' by the conscious mind, only becoming fixed concepts 'in the course of [man's] mental development, thanks largely to the introduction of measurement.' This, once again, strongly recalls Heidegger's account of the genesis of our vulgar concepts of time and space, and the covering over of our primordial existential experience:

> They [time and space] are hypostatised concepts born of the discriminating activity of the conscious mind, and they form the indispensable coordinates for describing the behaviour of bodies in motion. They are, therefore, essentially psychic in origin, which is probably the reason that impelled Kant to regard them as *a priori* categories. But if space and time are only apparently properties of bodies in motion and are created by the intellectual needs of the observer, then their relativisation by psychic conditions is no longer a matter for astonishment but is brought within the bounds of possibility. This possibility presents itself when the psyche observes, not external bodies, but *itself*.[119]

In the case of the parapsychic experiments, the subjects do not 'see' the shapes on the cards through some magical power of clairvoyance, for the information does not

[119] Ibid., p. 436.

reach them from the outside but from the *inside*. Thus for Jung the distinction between inner and outer is not as clear-cut as it was for Freud and 'reality testing' is not such a straightforward matter. These inner processes can become drawn to the subject's attention by the seeming 'impossibility' of the task, for as we saw above, archetypal contents emerge in a state of impasse or hopelessness and it is generally with the archetypes that we are dealing in synchronistic phenomena. The dream of the golden scarab, for instance, occurred at a critical moment of deadlock in the patient's treatment, and the scarab is supposedly a familiar archetypal symbol of rebirth. Since the collective unconscious is universal and unlocalisable, and by nature the same across every case, there is the ever-present possibility that what is taking place at any one time in the collective psyche of an individual is 'also happening in other individuals or organisms or things or situations.'[120] This is what apparently seems to have occurred in the scarab dream; it was a conscious representation deriving from the causally inexplicable unconscious knowledge of the events of the following day's session with her doctor.

What this bears witness to, according to Jung, is a form of '"knowledge", or "immediacy" of psychic images'[121] which does not derive from sense perception. The conscious interpretation of this unconscious knowledge comes upon the subject like any other spontaneous thought and can only be verified as a synchronistic occurrence after the physical event has been noted. This suggests that there may be many such examples of this inexplicable knowledge which are never recognised as such because the physical event with which it corresponds is not witnessed by the person to whom it has appeared. Many of us must have experienced at some time or

[120] Ibid., p. 481.
[121] Ibid., p. 446.

another that uneasy sensation of ominous precognition, and there are numerous stories, an example of which is given by Jung, where a person claims to have 'sensed' or known when a loved one has died. What happens in such cases 'is a kind of *creatio ex nihilo*, an act of creation that is not causally explicable',[122] something we ruled out as inconceivable in our previous chapter. The two impediments to such a notion were, firstly, that every psychical image or impression derives from sensibly given material and secondly, that the necessary consistency of the time-series precludes it. Both objections are overcome in the light of synchronistic phenomena, the first by the inexplicable non-sensible knowledge such experiences exhibit and the second by the 'psychic relativity' of time and its abolition in the unconscious.

So what Jung is 'finally compelled to assume' is that 'there is in the unconscious something like an *a priori* knowledge or immediate presence of events which lacks any causal basis.'[123] If such events were a case of causality then either the dream or vision which foresees a future or simultaneous event, 'caused' the event to take place in some telekinetic way, or the physical event 'caused' the psychical process, retroactively positing itself somehow. 'In either case', says Jung, 'we come up against the unanswerable question of transmission'.[124] This question of transmission is none other than that of the two possible relationships explaining the correspondence between object and representation that Kant gives in the letter to Marcus Herz. For Kant, as we know, in finite intuition the object is the cause of the representation while in the divine intuition it is the other way around. What Jung

[122] Ibid., p. 480.
[123] Ibid., p. 447.
[124] Ibid., p. 483.

does, however, is to displace the terms of the question by presenting a *third* alternative that Kant did not, and indeed could not, have considered.

This third alternative relies on the *unus mundus* hypothesis, suggesting that the two related terms – the psychical experience and the physical event – take place on another plane prior to their differentiation, and both the knowledge and the event itself could be said to be its respective manifestations. In other words, 'the same living reality [is] expressing itself in the psychic state as in the physical.'[125] So with regard to the two alternatives Kant poses, this would be neither a receptive nor a productive intuition, but still nevertheless a form of intelligible correspondence between thought and being, one that is not mediated through the senses. As such the problem of transmission is overcome, but what exactly forms the correspondence between the two states if it is not a case of causation? Jung's answer to this question postulates an *a priori* 'meaning' or equivalence, which exists independently of the psyche:

> If – and it seems plausible – the meaningful coincidence or 'cross-connection' of events cannot be explained causally, then the connecting principle must lie in the *equal significance* of parallel events; in other words, their *tertium comparationis* is *meaning*. We are so accustomed to regard meaning as a psychic process or content that it never enters our heads to suppose that it could also exist outside the psyche. But we do know at least enough about the psyche not to attribute to it any magical power, and still less can we attribute any magical power to the conscious mind. If,

[125] Ibid., p. 452.

> therefore, we entertain the hypothesis that one and the same (transcendental) meaning might manifest itself simultaneously in the human psyche and in the arrangement of an external and independent event, we at once come into conflict with the conventional scientific and epistemological views.[126]

So for Jung this is the *least* mystical, most scientifically rigorous explanation that does justice to the empirical data without ascribing to the psyche 'a power that far exceeds its empirical range of action', namely intellectual intuition. However, by avoiding attributing *this* particular supernatural power to the psyche, Jung risks ascribing to it another, equally extravagant faculty. For when the threshold of consciousness is sufficiently lowered so that unconscious, archetypal contents can penetrate into our conscious mind this can grant us access to what Jung calls, in quotation marks for caution, '"absolute knowledge"', pointing to 'the presence in the microcosm of macrocosmic events.'[127] The microcosm here, which like the Leibnizian monad reflects the whole of reality, is the collective unconscious.

This is speculative language which must necessarily sound somewhat far-fetched because it aims to render intelligible to consciousness something which is essentially inconceivable to it. So in the case of Swedenborg's prophetic vision, for instance, we are not dealing with paranormal foreknowledge, or still less psychokinesis, but with two distinct manifestations of the *same event* that are connected by 'meaning' or significance. Since in the unconscious psyche time and space no longer apply and 'knowledge finds itself in a space-time continuum in which space is no longer space, nor time time', then if the unconscious should

[126] Ibid., p. 482.
[127] Ibid., p. 489.

'develop or maintain a potential in the direction of consciousness, it is then possible for parallel events to be perceived or "known."'[128] Such knowledge cannot be deliberately utilised since such events are by their nature rare and incapable of being premeditated, but, to return to our theme, as science probes deeper into the workings of cognition it could eventually be in a position to definitively test Jung's hypothesis and possibly uncover such a parallelism between irrepresentable psychic and physical processes. More to the point, if the collective unconscious is indeed a repository of 'absolute knowledge' perhaps this could conceivably be harnessed and exploited, overcoming the reservations of our previous chapter and, in the words of Žižek, render this faculty 'potentially available to all of us'.

However, just as it was with the archetypes, such a notion is precluded in principle. For Jung, the psyche is not exclusively localised to cognitive activity, it rests also on 'a nervous substrate like the sympathetic system, which is absolutely different from the cerebrospinal system in point of origin and function, [and which] can evidently produce thoughts and perceptions just as easily as the latter.'[129] Jung illustrates this with anecdotal accounts of people in comas 'seeing' or 'knowing' what is going on around them and giving detailed reports of what they saw upon regaining consciousness, as well as the behaviour of lower organisms such as bees, which in their much-discussed communicative movements (or dances) display 'transcerebral thought and perception.'[130] What is more, the kind of knowledge displayed in synchronistic events 'has nothing to do with brain activity',[131] which categorically limits the reach of cognitive imaging technologies when it comes to

[128] Ibid., p. 481.
[129] Ibid., pp. 510-11.
[130] Ibid., p. 511.
[131] Ibid., p. 505.

attaining 'absolute knowledge'. Nonetheless, even if this particular psychical reservoir cannot be accessed via brain scan, Jung at least provides us with a model for rethinking the terms of our inquiry. Just as in Jung's analytic treatment the archetypes are constellated at a point of impasse to disclose a hitherto unthinkable means of escape, so Jung himself shows us a line of advance out of the impasse of finitude. This non-cerebral, bodily form of knowledge is, for Jung, an exemplar of the psychoid property inherent in matter so that 'thought', broadly conceived, is not confined to the human mind but pervades that which is its 'object'. Yet this is not a *simple* panpsychism, suggesting that water, plants or rocks possess a rudimentary form of conscious perception, although it is undoubtedly redolent of it. For such a notion could still be considered a dualism, extending the capacity for thought to inanimate objects while upholding its exceptional status.[132] Rather, Jung's ontology levels down the disjunction between 'mere thought' and positive being, since it is only for a system which strictly upholds such a distinction that the synchronicity phenomena remain inconceivable. These latter do not form a miraculous bridge establishing a momentary sympathetic connection between two isolated properties, but point to a way of re-conceiving the relationship itself, appearing to show 'that there is some possibility of getting rid of the incommensurability between the observed and the observer. The result, in that case would be a unity of being which would have to be expressed in terms of a new conceptual language – "neutral language," as W. Pauli once called it.'[133] Neutral because it does not distinguish or discriminate between what is inner and what is outer, the knower and the known.

[132] As a caveat it should be noted that panpsychism is a far from homogeneous concept and the charge of dualism would not necessarily apply to all of its variants.
[133] Jung, *Synchronicity*, p. 512.

We have covered much ground in this chapter so let us restate in summary some of the main points and attempt to draw them together more clearly. The ready availability of brain-computer interfacing technology and its easily foreseeable integration into the electronic appliances, entertainment systems and computers in the home was seen as the fulfilment of technology's promise to ease and hasten the satisfaction of needs and desires. This would allow us, in Freud's terms, to bypass reality and restore the pleasure principle to its place of unimpeded governance. Once again we were concerned with the gap between a thought, intention or wish and its actuality or realisation. We envisaged an autopoietic state of instant gratification, where one's desires and needs are immediately satisfied, such that instead of adjusting our pleasure goals in the face of reality it is reality itself that will be adjusted in the face of our demands. But this hyper-convenience would, taken to its extreme, immerse the user in an eternal indistinct present with no experience of anticipation, excitement or, indeed, pleasure. For, since pleasure is an economy, a play of heightening and lowering intensities, this state would not be a liberating ecstasy of enjoyment but rather a profound catatonic lethargy.

We then examined the possibility of supplementing our flawed, finite system of memory with a technological prosthesis, possibly allowing us to scroll through our mnemic archive the way we would a computer database. Moreover, since Freud often insists on the indestructibility of unconscious memory traces we were there ostensibly presented with the possibility of retaining every experience and sensation that has ever impressed upon us. It was, in the words of Freud, 'once more a

question of *external* and *internal*':[134] the external support coming to enhance and fulfil the internal, 'live' memory. After our brief reading of Derrida, however, we saw that this distinction was complicated and undermined *by* the very necessity of that external aid to memory and by the very real effects such supposedly derivative devices have on the actual functioning of our memory and the brain. This convenient distinction is further problematised by the potential impairment done by neuroimaging technologies to our ability to carry out 'reality testing', which, along with the auto-satisfaction of needs and desires, would put at risk our ability to distinguish waking life from dreaming.

Returning to the question of automatic wish fulfilment, we addressed the consequences for our intersubjective relationships and sense of self of being compelled via fMRI brain scanning technology to face up to those repressed fantasies which configure our reality while remaining structurally hidden from consciousness. This brought us to the paradoxical category of the 'objectively subjective', which effectively deprives us of our ownmost intimate subjective experience.

We were drawn to examine the strange status of these unpalatable unconscious processes, which are, according to Freud, withdrawn from the regime of language, and hence unknowable, but also, rather more problematically, timeless. Upon examining this latter property within the Kantian terms of our previous chapter, it was shown to be less a departure from the transcendental conditions than it appears at first sight, and perhaps how it appeared to Freud himself. However, within that

[134] 'Negation', p. 237.

timeless reservoir are not only the traces of sensibly given experiences but also primordial, pre-personal remnants, which in spite of Freud's intentions, open the door for Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. However, once again, on a first approach at least, we found that Jung's archetypes can still be made to be consistent with Kant's transcendental architectonic, due to the fact that we are forever barred access to the archetypes *in themselves*. Through the synchronicity phenomena, however, we were brought into the orbit of a potential route away from the shore of finitude: this was the speculative thesis of *unus mundus*, and the concomitant possibility of a psychical store of 'absolute knowledge'.

As long as thought is considered as an ontological exception, no technological contrivance can present itself to us as truly radical in this regard. What is more, thought itself is ill-served by what Alain Badiou calls 'the omnipresent motif of finitude': the 'discrete form via which thought yields in advance, accepting the modest role it is enjoined to play'.[135] The postulate of psychophysical synchronisation, then, simultaneously accomplishes two seemingly contradictory demands: firstly, by redrawing the ontological lines of demarcation it abolishes the special status of thought, bringing it down from its lonely tower and is thus consistent with cognitive science's insistence on treating consciousness as fundamentally no different from any other physical phenomenon. Secondly, in doing so, thought is not *reduced* but greatly enhanced and set free from finite limits and its enslavement to receptivity. It may not be intellectual intuition, but, as Meillassoux discovered, one cannot escape from the Kantian system using the tools found within it. It is necessary, nevertheless, to remain consistent with Kant in

[135] Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, trans. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (London & New York: Continuum, 2003) p. 163.

order to avoid charges of indulging in groundless metaphysical speculation, and this Jung does, despite the many accusations of mysticism, breaking with the refrain of finitude to re-imagine the subject-object relation.[136]

An obvious objection presents itself here in the light of this reference to our earlier discussion of Quentin Meillassoux: is *unus mundus* not simply an elaborate variation on the procedure Meillassoux calls 'absolutising the correlation'?[137] Paul Bishop, in his book *Synchronicity and Intellectual Intuition in Kant, Swedenborg and Jung*, contends as much, arguing that Jung succumbs to a mystic metaphysics in which mind and world form an absolute unity.[138] However, a more careful, sympathetic reading of Jung than Bishop seems willing to give reveals a rather more nuanced thinking to be at work. Far from an absolutised reciprocity of thought and being, this psychoid absolute, as I have tried to insist, takes place *prior to the correlation* and names a stratum of being antecedent to the differentiation into subject and object, thought and the given. Neither side of the relationship can be conceived in such terms; thought is not yet thought, being is not yet *given* to thought. This is why a new 'neutral language' is required.

So to return to those two founding moments of Meillassoux's discourse – the immanent point of departure and the subsequent transgression through logical reasoning (dianoetic intuition) – it can be seen that this procedure could be quite comfortably mapped onto that of Jung. As we have seen, Jung too recognises the

[136] In passing it can be noted that this thesis suggests a reinterpretation of the Parmenidean dictum that that thinking and being are one, without resorting to an idealist privileging of the former over the latter.
[137] Meillassoux, After Finitude, p. 37.
[138] Paul Bishop, *Synchronicity and Intellectual Intuition in Kant, Swedenborg, and Jung* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000) Bishop's main thesis is that Jung's work on synchronicity is based on a misprision – a creative misunderstanding of Kant.

necessity of remaining consistent with Kantian limits, while breaking free of them to allow thought to exceed itself and access an absolute independent of and prior to thought. Or in Meillassoux's terms, Jung escapes the correlationist circle from *within* rather than merely positing an autonomous real. Secondly, just as Meillassoux proceeds to access a primary absolute via the logical explication of an intuition (of facticity), so Jung's absolute is approached via rational demonstration following the intuition of causally inexplicable phenomena. Rather than attempting to erect a bridge which connects thought and being while forever keeping them separated by an irreducible chasm, Jung instead offers us a way of escaping the problem. For a bridge would merely be a means of passage or communication between two isolated territories, and this correspondence can only be conceived according to the relation of causality (Kant's letter to Herz again). So approaching this relationship *as a gap* precisely thwarts in advance every attempt to close it.

We have thus finally accomplished what we set out to do at the conclusion of our previous chapter and elsewhere, and compellingly undermined the gap between thought and objective reality by re-thinking the relationship altogether. Space constraints forbid us from following all the implications of such a seemingly outlandish thesis, but in passing we could perhaps propose a different way of conceptualising the creative process of the artist, in which it is conceived according to the synchronicity model; the relationship between the motivating idea or thought and the resulting object would then need to be reconsidered. Perhaps those rare moments of inspiration or 'eureka!' are not the subjective, albeit unconscious, creations of the individual mind but examples of acausal psychophysical correspondence. To simplify somewhat, perhaps the composer who 'hears' a

melody in a sudden inspiration, before transcribing it for an instrument to realise, experiences the inexplicable 'knowledge' or 'immediate presence' of that melody as a transpersonal process in much the same way as Swedenborg was 'visited' by the fire in Stockholm. To be an artist then, to create, would thus mean having a form of ecstatic knowledge; it would mean being privy to something (some 'inspiration' or 'idea') that has positive existence outside of oneself. Much the same could be said for those moments of absolute clarity experienced by the scientist, mathematician or philosopher, when one feels at last to have *understood* something in a flash of insight.

Such a proposal undoubtedly leaves us open to accusations of tying truth to the irrational, and of suggesting that all access to truth is necessarily on the order of revelation or enthusiasm. To such a charge we would reply that any scientific breakthrough, philosophical insight, artistic inspiration, or solving of a mathematical problem cannot be the result of simple rule-following, logical inference or calculation. There must be a *moment* of understanding in which all becomes clear – an essentially unjustifiable gap as Adorno has it – which is not merely the inevitable outcome of an implemented programme or formula, otherwise it would in principle be known already. It is this moment of insight or understanding that we are – tentatively – suggesting could be thought according to the model of Synchronicity. (However, it will no doubt not have escaped attention through this referral back to our earlier reading of Adorno that here the same point is being made but for precisely the opposite reason. Formerly, this gap or leap that constitutes insight was held to be proof of the irreducible separation of thought from being, while here it is being seen as evidence of their coincidence.)

The final question that faces us is this: if the subject-object dyad can be rethought as a neutral unity what implications does this have for intersubjectivity? Does it follow from the *unus mundus* hypothesis that the gap of unknowability between *subjects* can likewise be overcome, enabling some form of telepathic correspondence? This, inspired once again by advances in neurotechnology, will be the concern of our concluding chapter.

Chapter Four: Telepathy and the Other

Telepathy, then: the inner monologues of all the so-called teeming millions, of masses and classes alike, jostled for space within my head. In the beginning, when I was content to be an audience – before I began to act *– there was a language problem. The voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga dialects, from the purity of Lucknow Urdu to the Southern slurrings of Tamil. I understood only a fraction of the things being said within the walls of my skull. Only later, when I began to probe, did I learn that below the surface transmission – the front of mind stuff which is what I'd originally been picking up – language faded away, and was replaced by universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words.*

– Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*[1]

The problem of telepathy, thought-transference, or extra-sensory communication, is one that is generally given a wide berth in serious philosophical or scientific discourse, and relegated to the obscure domains of pseudo-science, mysticism and new-age quackery.[2] It is somewhat incongruous then that Freud, so concerned to establish the scientific credentials of psychoanalysis, should have devoted so much attention to the subject. Indeed the spectre of telepathy seems to have haunted him, particularly in later life, evidenced by the three papers he devoted to the subject, entitled 'Psychoanalysis and Telepathy', written in 1921 but only posthumously

[1] *Midnight's Children*, (London: Vintage, 2006) pp. 232-3.

[2] It has, however, figured in recent literary theory and cultural studies discourses, due in large part to the work of Nicholas Royle, both in his capacity as English translator of Derrida's essay 'Telepathy' (to which we will return), and also through his own writings, in particular *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), the essay 'The Remains of Psychoanalysis (i): Telepathy', in *After Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), and the chapter on 'The Telepathy Effect' in *The Uncanny: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.) See also J. Hillis Miller's very entertaining book *The Medium is the Maker: Browning, Freud, Derrida and the New Telepathic Ecotechnologies*, to which we have already referred.

published, 'Dreams and Telepathy', published in 1922, and 'Dreams and Occultism' from the *New Introductory Lectures* of 1933.[3] But even as early as the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* we find a description of an incident that could quite easily be interpreted as containing a telepathic element in all but name, and which already perhaps paves the way for Freud's later stated 'conversion' to telepathy.[4] It is an example of a collective failure of memory, in which a young woman forgets the name of the book *Ben Hur*, which, as very often happens, spreads like a contagion and spurs those around her to forget it also. In the course of analysis the reason for the woman's initial forgetting was attributed to its similarity to the phrase 'Ich bin Hure', meaning 'I am a whore'. Unconsciously her modesty prevailed and she spared herself this potential embarrassment by failing to bring the title to mind. But this does not account for the forgetfulness of the young men around her, unless we are to suppose that this was likewise the result of unconscious processes:

> Their unconscious minds picked up the real reason why the woman forgot the title and, as it were, interpreted it so that that their own forgetting it shows deference to her attitude of repudiation. It is as if, through her sudden lapse of memory, their interlocutor had given them a clear signal, which they unconsciously understood very well.[5]

[3] 'Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy', 1944[1921] (Standard Ed. 18) pp. 177-93; 'Dreams and Telepathy', 1922 (Standard Ed. 18) pp. 197-220; 'Dreams and Occultism', *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 1933 (Standard Ed. 22) pp. 31-56. There is also a short section in 'Some additional Notes on Dream Interpretation as a Whole', 1925 (Standard Ed. **19**) devoted to 'The Occult Significance of Dreams', pp. 135-8.
[4] This 'conversion' is declared in a letter to Ernest Jones, c1926, reproduced in Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*, vol. 3, (London: Hogarth, 1957) pp. 423-4.
[5] *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, p.43.

Here we have a queer form of communication in which both sender and recipient(s) are unaware of any communication actually having taken place. Both the content and the event of the delivery itself remain hidden to each of the correspondents, but it nevertheless has noticeable effects on their conduct. We could compare it to other occasions when we unconsciously pick up on certain 'signals', whether of annoyance or attraction, etc. Again, we might say that the sender is not *fully* aware they are sending out such signals, nor is the addressee *necessarily* aware that they are detecting them but nevertheless a certain communion takes place. In the case of flirtation for instance, it may not initially be an explicit recognition, but each person's behaviour is adjusted in accordance with the other's.

The case cited by Freud, however, is a far more complex kind of exchange than mere flirtation, the latter being more easily ascribed to implicit bodily communication rather than any extra-sensory connection. For if we are to give credence to the analytic interpretation, then each person in the group knows the name of the book the woman means to refer to, understands the reason for her temporary amnesia and tactfully follows suit, all of this taking place in a matter of seconds and entirely outside of their conscious knowledge. Through her failure to communicate the title of the book she succeeds in communicating her discomfort. As Freud writes some years later, '[it] is a very remarkable thing that the *Ucs*. of one human being can react upon that of another, without passing through the *Cs*.'[6] Both of these last two citations occur before Freud's 'conversion', but how are we to characterise such communication or 'reaction' if not as one of thought transference?

[6] 'The Unconscious', p. 194.

In the later, post-'conversion', work 'Dreams and Occultism', Freud even suggests that 'psychical transference' may have been the 'original, archaic method of communication between individuals'[7] only later evolving into more advanced forms of communication involving the sense organs. As an example of such a phenomenon he cites the seemingly inexplicable common purpose demonstrated by insect communities, much in the way that Jung refers to the communicative dances of the bees to demonstrate the possibility of trans-cerebral thought and communication.

However, as has been frequently noted by various commentators, Freud's feelings on the subject of telepathy are markedly inconsistent and characterised by considerable bad faith, due to his unease and trepidation about the potential consequences. Across the three 'telepathy papers' mentioned previously, and even within them, his position shifts between outright scepticism, calculated indifference and finally tentative acceptance. The possibility of telepathy, and the 'occult' in general, is viewed as a grave threat to his young science, due in the main perhaps to the popular suspicion that psychoanalysis itself is a form of obscure mysticism, and its terrain, the unconscious, regarded as a shadowy region of strange forces and impulses. Because of Freud's reticence and his concern to shield the science he founded from the perils of occultism, he is extremely reluctant to say anything conclusive on the subject, or set out a position for psychoanalysis to take towards it, for the fear is that as soon as the door to occultism is opened, everything they have worked for would be lost; all the advances made in understanding the psyche

[7] 'Dreams and Occultism', p. 55.

through empirical observation would be washed away by faith, superstition and obscurantism. There will be no further scope to develop their scientific knowledge, for as soon as one paranormal power or capacity has been granted there is no longer any defence against attributing anything at all to the psyche. So there is a regular reiteration of such statements as '[my] personal attitude […] remains unenthusiastic and ambivalent'[8] and 'I have no opinion on the matter and know nothing about it'.[9]

Yet in spite of this stated indifference Freud cannot simply pass over it in silence, and is concerned enough about it to ensure that *even if* there is such a thing as telepathy, although 'you will not even gather whether I believe in [its existence] or not',[10] it will in no way present a threat to psychoanalytical doctrine, in particular those concerning the dream. For, even if it were demonstrated beyond any doubt that a person had received a telepathic message while sleeping, this message 'will be treated as a portion of the material that goes to the formation of a dream, like any other external or internal stimulus, like a disturbing noise in the street or an insistent organic sensation in the sleeper's own body.'[11] So just as a buzzing fly would be incorporated into the dream-work, the inexplicable receipt of a telepathic message would likewise function merely as one element among others. Above all it must in no way lead the analytic community to reconsider or even add to the normative theory of dreams they have developed, for 'telepathy has nothing to do with the nature of dreams.'[12] After all, if the dream-work did not take place and a piece of telepathically communicated information were to appear in one's sleep unaltered and undisguised '[ought] we to call such a telepathic experience a

[8] 'Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy', p. 181.
[9] 'Dreams and Telepathy', p. 220.
[10] Ibid., p. 197.
[11] Ibid., p. 207.
[12] Ibid.

"dream" at all?'[13] For Freud we should rather call it 'a telepathic experience in a state of sleep. A dream without condensation, distortion, dramatisation, above all, without wish-fulfilment, surely does not deserve the name.'[14]

So telepathy, if such a thing can be demonstrated to exist, can contribute nothing at all to psychoanalytic theory or practice. The threat is thus annulled or even engulfed in advance. Once this is so, Freud can then soften his attitude toward the possibility of its existence, even to the point of outright affirmation; for when faced with what he considers to be irrefutable evidence, he goes as far as to say 'we must draw the inference that there *is* such a thing as thought-transference.'[15] And, furthermore, when analysis is applied to such instances it does not dissolve the phenomenon, by providing a rational explanation, but actually deepens its significance:

> It [analysis] teaches us that what has been communicated by this means of induction from one person to another is not merely a chance piece of indifferent knowledge. It shows that an extraordinarily powerful wish harboured by one person and standing in a special relation to his consciousness has succeeded, with the help of a second person, in finding conscious expression in a slightly disguised form[.][16]

Apparently then, thought-transference can definitively be seen to have taken place only when one person harbouring a particularly powerful unconscious wish

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 208
[15] 'Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy', p. 184. [My emphasis.]
[16] Ibid., pp. 184-5.

transmits it, along with 'the thoughts and knowledge relating to it',[17] to another person. This appeal to wish fulfilment firmly incorporates telepathic phenomena within a psychopathological symptomatology, akin to the structure of dreaming. Where in the dream such wishes force their way through to consciousness but only in a disguised form, here the wish is able to find expression only after taking a further detour through the mind of the other. There has, however, been a subtle shift in the form of unconscious communication that is in evidence here from that which takes place in the *Ben Hur* incident. For in the earlier account the event takes place without taking place and there is no active telepathic *agent* as such, rather a mysterious shared understanding. Here, however, telepathy is something that can be deliberately employed by the sender's unconscious. The question as to whether telepathy should be conceived as something shared and inexplicable or as an exploitable power with a definite sender and receiver is one that will underlie much of what follows in this chapter.

In more than one of the cases given by Freud there appears a fortune-teller who offers a prediction that, while failing to come true, is nevertheless embraced by the recipient because it gives voice to an unconscious wish in disguised form. One such example is of a young man who is told by a clairvoyant that his sister's husband will die of shellfish poisoning. The prediction was unfulfilled, and so ostensibly proved false, but after analysis has been applied it was shown to be an expression of the man's unconscious death-wish towards his brother-in-law (who had earlier had an attack of crayfish poisoning) based on his incestuous feelings of jealousy over

[17] Ibid., p. 189.

his marriage to his sister.[18] We can see here a further reason why Freud has cause to be fearful of telepathy and desirous to master and control it: for is not the fortune-teller in such cases in an analogous position to the analyst? He or she reveals to the client their own intimate, repressed wishes, much like what takes place in analysis. The seer could thus render the psychoanalyst's services redundant, were it not for the fact that there is something the former cannot do and only the analyst can: that is, disclose the meaning of the wish through interpretation.[19] The medium can merely report its distorted appearance, only with the help of analysis can its significance be revealed and can telepathy be demonstrated to have taken place. Without this work of analysis it is simply an erroneous prophecy.

So not only is telepathy no longer seen as a threat to be feared by psychoanalysis, the latter can actually enlighten and further our understanding of telepathy, 'in so far as, by the help of its interpretations, many of the puzzling characteristics of telepathic phenomena may be rendered more intelligible to us; or other, still doubtful, phenomena may for the first time be definitely ascertained to be of a telepathic nature.'[20] All of the examples provided by Freud are cases in which psychoanalysis 'comes to the aid of telepathy in a remarkable way';[21] meaning, only *after* the work of analysis has taken place can they be shown to be telepathic occurrences. Indeed analysis 'may actually be said to have created the occult fact.'[22] Telepathy is thus comfortably assimilated into the psychoanalytical canon, for 'if [it] is only an activity of the unconscious mind, then of course, no fresh

[18] Ibid., pp. 181-5.
[19] The same could be said of the possible 'threat' to psychoanalysis posed by dream visualisation technologies discussed in the previous chapter.
[20] 'Dreams and Telepathy', p. 219.
[21] Ibid., p.205.
[22] 'Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy' p. 189.

problem lies before us. The laws of unconscious mental life may then be taken for granted as applying to telepathy.'[23]

Freud's paranoid, initially grudging approach to such 'occult' phenomena is diametrically opposed to that of Jung, as can be seen from our previous considerations. For while the latter uses such seemingly unaccountable occurrences as the basis for a new theoretical framework, Freud's concern is merely to smother and contain them. As Derrida puts it, (Freudian) psychoanalysis 'resembles an adventure of modern rationality set on swallowing *and* simultaneously rejecting the foreign body named Telepathy, assimilating it and vomiting it up without being able to make up its mind to do one or the other.'[24]

However, I would suggest that the problem of telepathy cannot be so easily dealt with, and poses further-reaching questions for any consideration of subjectivity and intersubjectivity than Freud would have us believe. For if such communication takes place outside consciousness how am I to know which thoughts are 'my own' and which are the alien bodies which have been telepathically implanted? Any unconscious desire or impulse that determines my behaviour may not in fact be *my* desire but the desire of the other. The situation is much like when someone has been conditioned under hypnosis to respond in a certain way to some trigger; the mental impulse to respond no doubt forces itself upon the person as if it were his own when in reality it has been planted there by an outside agent. But then, to what extent can any thought be said to be 'my own'; that is, truly *mine* and nobody else's? *What* precisely is it that individuates me as separate and distinct from any

[23] 'Dreams and Telepathy', p. 220
[24] Derrida, 'Telepathy', trans. Nicholas Royle, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. 1 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007) p. 261.

other subject and does the possibility of telepathy threaten to overcome or abolish this distinction altogether?

Without wishing to echo Freud's careful reticence, it should be made clear that the question at issue for us here is not one of the 'existence' or otherwise of telepathy as a (super-)natural phenomenon. It is rather that of the mere conceptual possibility of thought-communication; that is, how it is to be conceived and what it may mean for intersubjectivity. Our real concern is to interrogate the gap between one mind and another and once more consider whether any form of technological enhancement could enable us to freely surmount it, or at least re-think it. After all, telepathy seems to be the inevitable outcome of the fMRI cognitive imaging experiments we have already considered, through which a subject's 'inner-space' becomes externalised for the other to access directly.[25] Furthermore, there is research under development at the University of Southampton specifically into the possibility of 'brain to brain communication'.[26] It uses the same principle as the BCI devices already discussed, however, instead of the neural information being transmitted to a machine in order to execute a command it is transmitted to the

[25] In 2009, theoretical physicist and noted futurologist Freeman Dyson opined in the online journal *Edge* that '"Radiotelepathy", the direct communication of feelings and thoughts' will be the most significant scientific development of the next 80 years. According to Dyson, '[to] make radiotelepathy possible, we have only to invent two new technologies, first the direct conversion of neural signals into radio signals and vice versa, and second the placement of microscopic radio transmitters and receivers within the tissue of a living brain. I do not have any idea of the way these inventions will be achieved, but I expect them to emerge from the rapid progress of neurology before the twenty-first century is over. [...] Another set of opportunities and responsibilities will arise when radiotelepathy is extended from humans to other animal species. We will then experience directly the joy of a bird flying or a wolf-pack hunting, the pain of a deer hunted or an elephant starved. We will feel in our own flesh the community of life to which we belong.' http://www.edge.org/response-detail/882/what-will-change-everything [Accessed 15.5.12.] The whole problem of our present chapter is in trying to conceive of what is described here firstly as 'the direct communication of feelings and thoughts', and secondly as the 'direct experience' of an experience which is not our own.

[26] University of Southampton, 'Communicating Person to Person Through the Power of Thought Alone', (6.10.09), http://www.southampton.ac.uk/mediacentre/news/2009/oct/09_135.shtml. [Last Accessed 15.5.2012.]

brain of another person. The first person – the sender – transmits a series of binary digits via the Internet to the second person, the latter's computer receiving the digits and transmitting them to the subject's brain by flashing an LED lamp. This pattern of flashes is too subtle to be picked up consciously, but it is detected by electrodes measuring the visual cortex of the receiver. The information is then extracted from the subject's brain activity and decoded by the computer software. So, much like in Freud's accounts, the communication here takes place unconsciously, effectively travelling *through* the brain of the second person without his or her conscious knowledge. The receiver only learns about what has taken place through reading it from the computer screen.

A number of questions are inevitable, such as why go to all this trouble when the receiver's computer could simply display the information without taking the extra detour through the imperceptible flashing lights and the subject's brain activity. Is it truly 'brain to brain communication' when the sense organs are still involved? Is not all communication thus 'brain to brain'? But, again, the issue for us is not the success or failure of any particular experiment, or the efficacy or potentiality of any given technological procedure. Essentially it is a question of mediation, of whether and how one mind could be immediately present to another through a technological conduit.

In Douglas Adams's *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* there is an episode involving a race of aliens who incurred the ire of an intergalactic tribunal for some transgression or other and were given the power of telepathy as punishment. To

prevent their every embarrassing or incriminating thought from being broadcast they all took to chattering ceaselessly about the weather and other trivialities to drown out and block such thoughts from forming. Thus, the frivolity of the example notwithstanding, as was the case with the faculty of intellectual intuition it may be that we should not see such an ability as necessarily a beneficial enhancement of our finite capabilities, and that here too that 'inscrutable wisdom through which we exist' may be no less deserving of our appreciation 'in what it has refused us than in what it has allotted us.'

But there is of course much more at stake here than the possibility of finding out things we didn't want to know, such as what our friends 'really' think of us, or the embarrassment caused by having our own innermost thoughts and desires transmitted for all to see, and we have already begun to outline the scope of the problem we will be addressing. To bring it into clear sight we can once again turn to a short, undeveloped point of Žižek's that will furnish us with our starting point. In addressing what is called in philosophical discourse 'the problem of other minds', namely whether and in what respects we can have conclusive knowledge of the minds of others and how we may know for certain that that those around us are not automata or 'zombies', Žižek writes that this question 'misses the point:'

> [If] I were to 'really know' the mind of my interlocutor, intersubjectivity proper would disappear; he would lose his subjective status and turn – for me – into a transparent machine. In other words, not-being-knowable-to-others is a crucial feature of subjectivity, of what we mean when we impute

> to our interlocutors a 'mind': you 'truly have a mind' only insofar as this is opaque to me.[27]

This would seem to suggest that the potential of telepathic communion would carry dangerous consequences with regards to the very otherness of the other and our intersubjective relationships with those around us. For if I were to gain access to the most intimate thoughts of the other would this not substitute a perfect transparency for the opacity supposedly constitutive of intersubjectivity? Would she become knowable in a way that presently escapes me? However, what Žižek leaves unaddressed but which from our perspective seems to be of fundamental import is how, exactly, we are to imagine 'really knowing' the other's mind. At first glance it seems intuitively straightforward: to *really* know someone's mind in this absolute sense would mean to be given access to their every private thought, desire, sensation, hope, etc., to the point at which nothing is held back in reserve. It would mean having a complete insight into the workings of their consciousness such that they are no longer *other* at all but known in their entirety. But how is this 'knowledge' to be communicated or manifested? What form is it to take, and can it ever truly annul the other's primordial otherness? Furthermore, as Derrida puts it, where telepathy is concerned 'is it even a question here of knowing?'[28]

Žižek's point echoes something Kant says in the second *Critique*:

> Hence one can grant that if it were possible to have so deep an insight into a human being's way of thinking – as this manifests itself through internal as

[27] Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 178.
[28] 'Telepathy', p. 226.

> well as external actions – that we would become acquainted with every incentive to actions, even with the slightest, and likewise with all external promptings affecting these incentives, then we could calculate a human being's conduct for the future with certainty, just like any lunar or solar eclipse[.]

Again, the consequences of gaining this power of insight into the mind of another would be that they come to be seen as a 'transparent machine', whose every thought and action would be as predictable as a wind-up toy. They could never surprise us, lie to us or keep a secret from us. But we have illicitly interrupted this quotation from Kant mid-sentence in order to highlight the initial parallel with Žižek but also to bring out more clearly the difference between the two statements. For having said that through gaining this absolute insight we could calculate the other's conduct as surely as any lunar or solar eclipse, Kant goes on to say that 'we could nonetheless assert that the human being is free':

> For if we were capable also of another view (a view which, to be sure, has not been bestowed upon us at all, but in place of which we have only the rational concept), viz., an intellectual intuition of the same subject, then we would nonetheless become aware that this entire chain of appearances *depends*, with regard to whatever can be of concern to the moral law, *on the spontaneity of the subject* as a thing in itself – a spontaneity for the determination of which no physical explanation can be given at all.[29]

[29] AA 99. [My italics.]

The first thing to note is that this faculty of telepathy is a further aspect of intellectual intuition not considered in our second chapter, and so it is once more a question of finitude that is at issue. Secondly, more importantly, is the assertion that even though this intellectual intuition into the mind of the other would make his thoughts and actions exhaustively knowable and predictable, *something* would still be held back which is not reducible to this collection of information and that is precisely his *spontaneity*, upon which the 'entire chain of appearances depends'. We can know everything that a man will think and do from his birth up until his death and yet on some level he will always escape us and remain outside of our knowing because he is a free, spontaneous being. Every one of these actions and thoughts, calculable and knowable in advance as they may be, thus has their source outside of ourselves. This freedom is that which ensures that it remains *his* life, not mine, no matter how much knowledge I may have of his thoughts and intentions. In the words of Levinas, 'The strangeness of the Other, his very freedom!'[30]

To be sure this is not strictly speaking the point that Kant wishes to make here, rather he is concerned with showing (as we discussed in Chapter Two) that, while our behaviour is subject to causal determinants, we are still free, autonomous beings. Knowing all possible constituent factors influencing a person's behaviour still does not abrogate that person of his or her responsibility, and each subject can only – and must – take that responsibility *for themselves*. The point is that all our behaviour can conceivably be ascribed to causal factors – whether external, such as our upbringing or our environment, or internal, such as our genes or our inherited behavioural patterns – and yet this does not tell the whole story; something will

[30] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) p. 73.

always remain left over in such an account, something indivisible. The upshot is that having complete, comprehensive knowledge of the other's existence, including his interior life, will still not get hold of the 'person' himself, 'refractory to every typology, to every genus, to every characterology, to every classification',[31] as Levinas puts it. That which constitutes him as a subject is his spontaneity, and this is precisely what can never be made into the object of a grasping knowledge or placed under the power of *my* spontaneity. Put slightly differently, I could know *what* someone thinks or does, as well as *why* they think or act as they do, but *that* they do it is what escapes me. Hypnotic manipulation (*à la* Doctor Mabuse, for example) might be the closest we could get to this power over the 'that' of his experience, but at the very moment when I gain this power over his spontaneity he has already eluded me. That which we desire to access ('his very freedom!') will have been lost the moment *his* actions become *my* actions, thus as Levinas says of murder, this would be at once power and impotency.[32]

However, we are jumping ahead of ourselves and anticipating what has yet to be argued. And once again we have failed to address the question of exactly *how* this knowledge or insight into the other's mind could be manifested to us, or how this communication is to take place. Is it a case of having 'learned' it, in which case it would be presented as an 'outside' piece of knowledge as it were and essentially no different to having heard or read it. Or does it somehow 'emerge' in one's mind; as in, the thought *X* just occurs to you? The terminology we have been using to differentiate the sender from the receiver (one *thinks*, the other *knows* what that person thinks) presupposes an active role and a passive role and a respective

[31] Ibid.
[32] 'Murder exercises a power over what escapes power. It is still a power, for the face expresses itself in the sensible, but already impotency, because the face rends the sensible.' Ibid., p.198.

difference in manifestation. When I talk to a neighbour we are each aware that one is speaking while the other is listening. But if this communication were to take place through thought alone perhaps those roles would become confused. If a thought just occurs to both of us, how would we know for sure which of us is the source of that content, or even if we just happen to be thinking the same thing?

In television and film the power of telepathy is routinely portrayed as the ability to 'hear' somebody's thoughts as if eavesdropping on their interior monologue. This is a useful fictional device but it surely cannot be considered as a serious possibility because it pictures conscious experience as the constant narration of one's every thought and experience in full grammatical sentences. A particularly ridiculous example of this was in the science fiction television series *Heroes*, about a group of ordinary people who begin to exhibit supernatural powers, one of whom was endowed with the faculty of telepathy. This ability was thwarted in one absurd scene by the villain starting to 'think' in Japanese to disguise his thoughts. However, as incredible as this clearly is, could there conceivably be any other form of telepathic communication, which, as it were, penetrated 'below' language to access some 'universally intelligible thought-forms' that exceeded or transcended words, as in the above passage from *Midnight's Children*? Would this not unavoidably envisage a model of conscious life equally as simplistic as that of continuous internal soliloquy: namely, one of an inner space prior to language that 'translates' its thoughts into words? Is there any form of thought *without* language, and consequently is language the only way in which a thought or experience could conceivably be communicated from one subject to another, even if that language were unspoken?

Alternately we could perhaps picture another form of telepathic communion, something along the lines of another familiar Science Fiction trope that we might call a 'Mind-Merge'. In other words, supposing through a technological intermediary I were able to directly experience the thoughts of someone else *as if they were my own*; to experience and think them exactly as they do *as they are thinking them*. Would this then be a more immediate or direct form of communication, something like the immediate presence of one mind to another, without the supplement of language? These two models, that of eavesdropping on another person's internal monologue and the merging of one mind with another to experience their phenomenological inner space first hand, will direct our approach towards the problem of telepathy.

The Language of Thought: Wittgenstein and Nietzsche on Public and Private Language

We felt intuitively that we needed to reject the picture of telepathic communication provided by *Heroes* (as well as numerous other examples we might cite) because it struck us as preposterously crude and simplistic. If I really were able to access the private thoughts of another, it surely would not be so simple as hearing an 'inner voice'. Moreover, if this indeed *were* the only form that telepathic communication could conceivably take, while it would undoubtedly be radically intrusive, would it truly enable this *absolute knowledge* of the other that would divest them of their otherness? Would it allow me to really get at or to the other *herself*, or would I still remain at an insurmountable distance? For in the words of Kierkegaard, '[the]

moment I speak I express the universal',[33] so '[seen] as an immediate, no more than sensate and psychic being, the individual is concealed.'[34] As Derrida puts it, in a reading of Kierkegaard, '[once] I speak I am never and no longer myself, alone and unique.'[35] Now transposing this to the question of telepathy, surely a merely 'internal', i.e. unspoken, thought that is expressed in the medium of language is governed by the same structure as a spoken utterance. If I were to think to myself 'I must remember to renew my library books' and someone were to access that thought it would in essence be no different to having said it aloud; I would still have 'expressed the universal' rather than my own irreplaceable individuality, even in mere thought. No sooner have I formed such a thought than I have already entered the universal. Prior to its linguistic expression it is not yet accessible to me but as soon as it *becomes* accessible to me it is no longer *my* thought but a general one.

It would of course be ridiculous to suggest that all of our everyday cognitive activity takes such a form, as if speaking to oneself internally, but does this mean that thought then outstrips language, and is hence antecedent to linguistic expression? Much of Derrida's critique of Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena* centres around the latter's belief in 'the existence of a pre-expressive and prelinguistic stratum of sense, which the [phenomenological] reduction must sometimes disclose by excluding the stratum of language.'[36] Such an assumption, as Derrida elsewhere puts it, 'supposes that, prior to the sign and outside it, excluding any trace and any *différance*, something like consciousness is possible.

[33] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin 1986) p. 89.
[34] Ibid., p. 109.
[35] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) p. 60.
[36] *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) p. 31.

And that consciousness, before distributing its signs in space and in the world, can gather itself into its presence.'[37] So what Derrida critiques here under the rubric of a metaphysics of presence is the same supposition later given the name of the 'bureaucratic' model of speech generation by Dennett, which we covered in the first chapter. This, once again, is the image of a pre-linguistic presence to self who formulates a thought and then subsequently finds words to express that thought, as if fulfilling a prior intention. Language is here seen as an accessory to thought, or a mere vehicle, necessary to make ourselves understood to others but not intrinsic to the act of thinking itself. On this model it makes sense to imagine that something would be 'lost in translation' and that the words chosen are always a form of bricolage, perhaps not 'fitting' the thought exactly but approximating to it as best we can with the limited vocabulary available to us. But as we were previously led to assert following our reading of Croce, there surely is no thought in any real sense that has not been 'expressed', and language is simply the form that this expression takes. Such an expressed thought that could be communicated from one person to another by whatever means, sensory or non-sensory, must be distinguished from habitual, instinctive behavioural patterns that take place, as we say, 'without thinking'.[38]

[37] *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 16.

[38] There is a vast, seemingly endless literature surrounding the relationship between thought and language, and we will be deliberately limiting our scope here in order not to become lost in it. However, one interesting contribution to which we might refer in passing is Donald Davidson's essay 'Thought and Talk', first published in 1975 and subsequently collected in the book *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarenden, 1984) pp 155-70. The central claim in this difficult and extremely condensed essay is that thought is dependent upon various patterns of belief (e.g., the thought 'I am cold, the window must be open' implies a whole chain of interlocking beliefs, the most obvious of which being that an open window can be the cause of coldness), and in order to have a belief we must possess the *concept* of belief, for which we must be members of a language community. In other words, I can only entertain a belief if I understand what it means for that belief to be true or false and, as we will see with Wittgenstein, this implies a 'criterion of correctness' shared among a language community. Since a dog cannot understand what it means for a belief to be mistaken, which would require that it be able to communicate and share information with others, so we cannot say that a dog 'believes' that his master will come home to feed him. And

However, we can here pick up on a point also raised in our first chapter, regarding what takes place when this expression fails us and we have to settle for a word or phrase that seems inappropriate or inadequate. Is this not demonstrative of the noncoincidence of language and thought, and indeed evidence of a prelinguistic stratum of thought that is formed in advance and awaiting expression? We suggested previously that it would be absurd to imagine a computer program giving expression to such a 'thought' that we ourselves cannot articulate, but if another subject were to gain telepathic insight into my conscious life would there be any sense in suggesting that they could *feel* what I mean in such a case? And would they in fact gain a purer understanding of my thought here than if I had managed to put it into words, since it has not yet been diluted by the universal? As Wittgenstein puts it,

> What happens when we make an effort – say in writing a letter – to find the right expression for our thoughts? – This phrase compares the process to one of translating or describing: the thoughts are already there (perhaps were there in advance) and we merely look for their expression. This picture is more or less appropriate in different cases. – But can't all sorts of things happen here? – I surrender to a mood and the expression comes. Or a picture occurs to me and I try to describe it. Or an English expression occurs to me and I try to hit on the corresponding German one. Or I make a gesture, and ask myself: What words correspond to this gesture? And so on.

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so, since thought rests on beliefs, there cannot be thought without language, or 'a creature cannot have thoughts unless it is an interpreter of the speech of another.' p. 157.

> Now if it were asked: 'Do you have the thought before finding the expression?' what would one have to reply? And what, to the question: 'What did the thought consist in, as it existed before its expression?'[39]

The answer must surely be that there is the *intention-to-say* something (internally to ourselves, or externally to others), but this would not be a *thought* that could for instance be harnessed technologically and passed on to another mind who may perhaps understand it in a more profound way than if it were to take the detour through the generality of language. For, '[an] intention is embedded in its situation', and so the intention-to-speak or even intention-to-think before we find the suitable words for the expression cannot be abstracted from the language that we speak: 'In so far as I do intend the construction of a sentence in advance, that is made possible by the fact that I can speak the language in question.'[40] This is precisely the same point raised in our first chapter with regards to musical composition. There we asked whether it made sense to imagine that the BCI technology would enable somebody without any prior musical training to compose a piece of music, but we suggested that this naively conceives of musical ability as something that could be learned subsequently in order to translate an 'idea' that otherwise would be inhibited. However, as Wittgenstein puts it, 'one can only say something if one has learned to talk. Therefore in order to *want* to say something one must also have mastered a language'.[41] The word that refuses to come to mind is merely the result of a lapse of memory, akin to the failure to remember a person's name. It is by no means evidence of a thought that has taken shape before its

[39] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972) § 335, p. 108.
[40] Ibid., § 337.
[41] Ibid., § 338, p. 109.

descent into language. Until I have managed to find expression for my thought even I myself do not 'know' what I mean, for it makes no sense to speak of 'meaning' here at all.

So the idea of accessing a stratum of consciousness – whether our own *or* that of the other via telepathy – beneath language, a layer that is fully constituted, present to itself and prior to the 'external' recourse to language, would seem to be a metaphysical one. Consequently, since, once again, language expresses the universal or the general we come no closer to the other in their singularity by means of telepathy than via any other form of communication. Telepathy would thus be no more radical than speech. However, this still assumes that there *is* a unique singularity that belongs to the other and which language seemingly misses and cannot get hold of. We have suggested that since language still 'stands in the way' between myself and the other, even when we communicate telepathically, then her otherness, which is the very condition of intersubjectivity, still remains 'intact'. But, to reiterate once more, if there is *no* silent, prelinguistic self, and if language is inherently general, then what exactly is there within me that escapes language and is truly my own? It seems we cannot have it both ways: either the other is already intrinsically knowable, because we speak the same language, or there is something specific to her beyond and outside of language and which will always remain outside of my grasp. The question as to *what* exactly constitutes this singularity of the other in her otherness is one to which we will have cause to return.

But if we are to accept for now that language is always-already implicated in thought, and is hence the only conceivable way in which telepathic communication

could take place, we may want to ask whether we might conceivably be able to jettison the general language of others in order to construct a wholly personal vocabulary of invented words and phrases, and thus generate a language of thought that might be truer to our intimate experience. That is to say, as Wittgenstein famously puts it, would it be possible to imagine 'a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences – his feelings, moods, and the rest – for his private use?' That is, a language in which the 'individual words […] are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.'[42] This would be a language in which I coin personal names for thoughts, feelings and sensations which cannot be pointed at or explained to another person since they are purely internal phenomena. For if I were to decide to use the word 'hammock' instead of 'table' and then ask to book a hammock at a restaurant, after some initial confusion I could eventually point to or describe the object designated and say, *this! This* is what I call a hammock! My confused interlocutor would then of course tell me that I am mistaken and that it is in fact called a table. But if these fabricated names refer only to private, interior sensations and are intended only for my 'personal use', could I not be said to have developed a 'private language' that only I understand and that as such *fits* my thoughts, feelings and sensations more accurately and truly than the universal language which I must learn from others and which is not personal to me? For, in using a common word to name or describe a sensation that seems completely unique to my own experience I betray that sensation and lose it in its particularity. However, if I myself invent the name, rather than having to learn it, perhaps the sensation can remain 'mine' alone

[42] Ibid., § 243, pp. 88-9

and as such I can do it greater justice. The sense is that if we all were to invent such private languages for our own private experiences we would do greater justice to our uniqueness as individuals.

However, even if I *were* to invent a name for such a private sensation, as Wittgenstein reminds us, 'one forgets that a great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense.'[43] This 'stage-setting' is the background or foundation upon which this ostensibly private language is built, namely the ready-made structure of an already existing common language. Any so-called 'private language' would thus necessarily be parasitic upon a common, non-private language. For if one gives a name to a particular sensation, it must be remembered that '"sensation" is a word in our common language, not of one intelligible to me alone. So the use of the word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands.'[44] Even if I then invent a word to replace 'sensation', this in turn will rest on something else within the common language, and outside of this background context there would be no traction for this language to gain a footing. If we finally dispense altogether with the word 'sensation' and resort to something as vague as 'when he writes "S" [his invented word], he has *something*' we forget that '"Has" and "something" also belong to our common language.'[45] Such a private language could therefore only ever be a useless adjunct to an already constituted – and shared – language.

And this last point of its being useless is also key, for if I were to say 'I have a chronic *X*' and someone asks me what this means and I say 'I mean that it hurts in

[43] Ibid., § 257, p. 92.
[44] Ibid., § 261, p. 93.
[45] Ibid.

here' and point to my head, she will then reply 'so you mean you have a headache?' I might want to say 'no, "headache" doesn't quite capture it, and it's not quite a migraine either, it's something else and I have decided to call it *X*.' The following question would of course be *why*? What purpose does it serve? The only reason for naming it in the first place would be in order to communicate it to somebody else, and if *X* gives no information then it is worthless. All that I could say in order to make myself understood is that *X* is a species of what we generally call a headache, but then the word headache captures sufficiently what I am trying to say. But aside from my being unable to communicate this sensation *X* to others without recourse to additional words from our common language that they might understand, am I nevertheless able to bestow a sense upon it privately, so that it *does* actually carry signification, but only for myself? As Wittgenstein writes,

> Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign 'S' and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation. – I will remark first of all that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated. – But still I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition. – How? Can I point to the sensation? Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation – and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. – But what is this ceremony for? for that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign. – Well, that is done precisely by the concentrating of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connection between the sign and the sensation. – But "I impress it on myself" can only mean: this

> process brings it about that I can remember the connection *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'.[46]

The point is, without a stable, external 'criterion of correctness', in what sense does this private definition carry any meaning at all? The first such criterion as to whether I am using a word in its correct sense would be the physical world – I appeal to the object itself, confident of course that this object will remain the same object each time I encounter it, for if it were subject to aleatory transformation the name would have no sense. But in the case of a private sensation there is no such criterion of stability and it may in fact be a different sensation each time, for all I have to refer to is my memory of it.

The other external criterion by which we measure its correctness is the linguistic community, that is, we appeal to the shared language guaranteed by a community of speaking subjects. This means that in cases of uncertainty there will be an arbiter to whom I can appeal as to whether I am right or wrong in my use of this particular word: whether a dictionary or another person who speaks the same language as I do. Obviously, however, the whole purpose of inventing a private language is that I myself am the only judge, since it is I alone who am capable of understanding it and I alone who can guarantee its rightness and wrongness. In the absence of both of these criteria, the only authority to which I can appeal is whether it *seems* right to me, but then it makes no difference at all whether I misrecognise the sensation or

[46] Ibid., § 258, p. 92.

remember it the same each time, since I am the only one to whom it matters. This, as Wittgenstein points out, simply means that we are unable to talk about rightness and wrongness in such a case, and if there is no possibility for me to be right or wrong about my definition then such a word is meaningless. I may still hold fast to my belief that it nonetheless holds meaning *for me* but such a gesture, as Wittgenstein humorously puts it, would be like my right hand writing a cheque to my left hand; a completely arbitrary and inconsequential ceremony.

So language is a social phenomenon and not something that could be dreamed up privately. Even if I do invent a new language from the ground up, only if there is the *possibility* for shared agreement and understanding of definitions is it a functional language. As such it is no longer a 'private' language at all but a public one, even though I myself am its originator. This is not to say that someone who lived their whole life in complete isolation – like the story of Kaspar Hauser for example – and never encountered another human being or learned a language, would be *necessarily* excluded from language and unable to invent his own. The only way such a language could *be* a language at all, however, is if it could in principle be measured against the two external criteria. More to the point, if I were to remain in perfect isolation my entire life then why would I even think to construct a language at all, since I would have nobody to communicate or converse with? If I were to do so, merely for my own amusement say, without the *potential* for the agreement of others it is not a language at all. If I wished to ensure that I did not keep forgetting and inadvertently reinventing this language of mine – still for the benefit of myself alone – and so wrote some form of primitive dictionary, then as soon as I establish this external criterion to which I can appeal it is already a *de*

jure universal language, even if I remain its *de facto* only speaker. If it could in principle be learned by another then it is as general and public as any other language.

The innately social and non-private essence of language is also insisted upon by Nietzsche in a remarkable passage in *The Gay Science* titled 'On the "genius of the species."'[47] In fact, here it is even suggested that consciousness itself is intersubjective in its origin and nature, which comes to shed an interesting new light upon the supposed inseparability of thought and language. Nietzsche's contention is that man's conscious self-experience developed out of his sociality and his need to communicate. For, on its own account, consciousness is 'superfluous', and '[the] whole of life would be possible without, as it were, seeing itself in a mirror.' This is true not only of our primal needs and urges, but also of our 'thinking, feeling, and willing life, however offensive this may sound to older philosophers':[48]

> Consciousness is really only a net of communication between human beings; it is only as such that it needed to develop; a solitary human being who lived like a beast of prey would not have needed it. That our actions, thoughts, feelings, and movements enter our own consciousness – at least a part of them – that is the result of a "must" that for a terribly long time lorded it over man. As the most endangered animal, he *needed* help and protection, he needed his peers, he had to learn to express his distress and to make himself understood; and for all of this he needed 'consciousness' first

[47] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science; With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Vintage, 1974.) Book Five, § 354, pp. 297-300.
[48] Ibid., p. 297.

> of all, he needed to 'know' himself what distressed him, he needed to 'know' how he felt, he needed to 'know' what he thought. For, to say it once more: Man, like every living being, thinks continually without knowing it; the thinking that rises to *consciousness* is only the smallest part of this – the most superficial and worst part – for only this conscious thinking *takes the form of words, which is to say signs of communication*, and this fact uncovers the origin of consciousness.[49]

Thus, since man is a social animal and not an entirely self-sufficient one, he is continually dependent upon the assistance of others. If, for example, I needed to communicate that I was hungry, or that I had injured my arm, I first of all need to formulate this requirement to myself and become *conscious* of what my needs are before I can then communicate them to another who might be in a position to help me. So, one could say that one 'communicates' with oneself, i.e., is conscious and self-reflexive, solely out of the need to communicate to others. Therefore, in Nietzsche's account, not only would a Kaspar Hauser figure have no need of language, but as a result he would not even develop conscious experience of himself, because he would have no need of it. This, however, does not mean that he would act entirely on instinctual impulses and bodily drives and have no intellectual activity. For, again, it is not only our biological urges and needs that are essentially unconscious but also thought itself. And, once again, since consciousness *is* language, and language is universal or social, conscious experience does not truly belong to 'man's individual existence, but rather to his social or herd nature'.[50] As a

[49] Ibid., pp. 298-9.
[50] Ibid., p. 299.

result, since the 'language' through which we know ourselves (consciousness) belongs to the herd and not to ourselves alone,

> [Given] the best will in the world to understand ourselves as individually as possible, "to know ourselves," each of us will always succeed in becoming conscious only of what is not individual but "average." […] Fundamentally, all our actions are altogether incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual; there is no doubt of that. But as soon as we translate them into consciousness *they no longer seem to be*.[51]

So what is most *our own* takes place without the knowledge of our conscious self, and thus without our being able to 'experience' it. Our only access to ourselves comes via the indirect route of the herd and hence even in our own intimate conscious experience we fail to truly know ourselves. If we try to sneak up on ourselves unawares and arrive at our true essence, no sooner have we done so than we have already lost it and are left grasping at its shadow. This bears a clear resemblance to Derrida's critique of Husserl: there is no *immediate* reflexive self-experience that does not pass through a certain externality and hence commonality. Where Nietzsche departs from Derrida is in his subsequent assertion of the existence of a pre-conscious or unconscious self, which is the *true*, unique individual. So *conscious* thought is still inseparable from language, but this is only a secondary, derived phenomenon. *True* thought that is mine and mine alone is structurally inaccessible to me.

[51] Ibid.

We should not avoid remarking upon the obvious here, which is the proto-Freudian character of this passage. Much of this section could be re-written using the language of psychoanalysis, for the ego is similarly a surface phenomenon, which is encompassed by the more primordial and essential id. Likewise the ego develops out of the id as a result of our contact with the external world and in particular our relationships with others. However, while in Nietzsche's account *every* aspect of our conscious lives, including reason, functions more originally on an unconscious level, with only its most superficial aspect entering consciousness, for Freud, reason and common sense are contributed by the ego alone, and the id is the repository only of the passions.[52] But what interests us here is this relationship between consciousness and language, for we saw in our previous chapter how for Freud as well as Nietzsche, word-presentations are that which make the difference between a conscious and an unconscious process, and thus our conscious knowledge of this primal side of ourselves will always be mediated and indirect. By the interposition of word-presentations, 'internal thought-processes are made into perceptions',[53] and by so making them into perceptions we set ourselves at a distance from them and confront them as if they came from outside. In Nietzsche's terms they become no longer *our* thought processes at all but the merely general thoughts of the herd. Therefore, in order to make a thought communicable – to ourselves as well as others – we rob it of its truth and betray our innermost selves.

Things become even more interesting when we recall that for Freud communication also takes place between one unconscious and another, and that this was even our primordial means of communication, before gestural and spoken language (and so

[52] Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', p. 25.
[53] Ibid. p. 23.

before the advent of consciousness according to Nietzsche.) But as we have seen, the moment we introduce this complicating factor it means that we can no longer be certain whether an unconscious thought or desire is indeed our own or that of the other. And if communication can indeed take place without being rerouted through consciousness, if there is even a minimum of communicability to unconscious thoughts and desires, then they must exist in the form of a common or shared 'language', otherwise this would be inconceivable. If, then, we are to say with Nietzsche that when a thought becomes conscious is it is translated into 'the perspective of the herd', following Freud this would in fact be nothing more than the translation of one general form into another. For if even our most primordial, unconscious thoughts and desires are marked by commonality and subject to the infiltration of the other then no matter how far back we regress it seems we will never reach this kernel of individuality or singularity that belongs to me alone and which is not touched by the trace of 'the herd'. Were our innermost thoughts '*incomparably* personal, unique, and *infinitely* individual' as Nietzsche contends, how could even the smallest part be transposed into a heterogeneous stratum that is common to all? Either the separation between our conscious selves and our 'true', unique (unconscious) selves is absolute, making translation from one into the other impossible, or there is already a latent or inherent communicability and universality common to each person's 'individual existence'.

So despite unconscious processes being deprived of the word-presentations corresponding to them, which ostensibly withdraws them from language, if communication is to take place (either between one unconscious and another or between the id and its ego) this must still take the form of language, otherwise there

could be no common measure across the different territories, and hence no communicability (or perhaps *nothing but* communicability, meaning this would be prior to individuation or ipseity.) We are therefore still some way from describing a form of telepathic communication radical enough to overcome the gap between one subject and another. Nor have we isolated or pinned down what exactly it is that constitutes the other in his or her otherness and so what it is, outside of language, that we suppose telepathy may enable us to get hold of. Intersubjectivity seems always to be one step ahead of individual subjectivity. But there still nevertheless seems to be *something* that language cannot quite capture, something about our innermost psyche that, as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard believe, is either betrayed, sacrificed or at least concealed by language. The answer may lie in our immediate sensuous experience, in *how the world seems* to each of us.

'Behold her with my eyes and she will appear a goddess to you.'[54]

Even if we are exceptionally articulate, language can often fail us when it comes to expressing our most personal feelings and experiences. Here the inadequacies of language confront us head on and its noncoincidence with our intimate, private existence is laid bare. We feel perhaps that such experiences are irreconcilable with the generality of words, an obvious case being how people in love very often feel that they are unable to communicate how they feel to their loved one(s) and that the

[54] 'What someone once said of Homer – that to understand him well means to admire him – is also true for the art works of the ancients, especially the Greeks. One must become as familiar with them as with a friend in order to find their statue of Laocoon just as inimitable as Homer. In such close acquaintance one learns to judge as Nicomachus judges Zeuxis' Helena: "Behold her with my eyes", he said to an ignorant person who found fault with this work of art, "and she will appear a goddess to you."' Winckelmann, J.J., *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, 1755, trans. Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1987) p. 5.

word ‘love’, dulled through overuse, does not even approach that which they wish they could say. ‘How much do you love me?’ is a question that it is impossible to answer. So there does seem to be a structural inarticulacy to many of our most intimate, private feelings, and since, as we have already seen, we cannot construct a private language to express them we might feel that we want to just *show* the person how it feels – look *this* is how I feel about you, *this* is how much I love you.

David Foster Wallace, in his poignant short story *Good Old Neon*, addresses this seeming inadequacy of language to get at the true heart of our experience, describing the inexpressible manner in which an apparently infinite richness of thoughts and associations rushes through one’s head in an instant. This is a feeling that...

> bears so little relation to the sort of linear, one-word-after-another-word English we all communicate with each other with that it could easily take a whole lifetime just to spell out the contents of one split-second’s flash of thoughts and connections, etc…What goes on inside is just too fast and too huge and all interconnected for words to do more than barely sketch the outlines of at most one tiny little part of it at any given instant.[55]

But again, if language cannot penetrate the seemingly infinite depths of our experience, what if we could exhibit this instantaneous ‘flash’ just how it comes upon us, and transmit it to another mind, so that all the flood of meanings and

[55] David Foster Wallace, *Oblivion: Stories*, (London: Abacus, 2005) p. 151. Although referring back to our earlier reading of Croce (and Hegel) might lead us to query this seeming ‘infinite richness’ of experience exceeding the scope of what can be expressed. If such an experience escapes expression then perhaps it is an illusory one.

associations that we could never begin to outline in words were made immediately known to the other?

In the science-fiction film *Brainstorm* (Dir. Douglas Trumbull, 1983), a group of scientists are working on a technology that can do precisely what we are describing here: that is, communicate a first person experience to a third person via virtual reality headsets. Their earliest prototype enables the receiver to see what the other person sees, as if experiencing by proxy, or inhabiting the other's body. But a subsequent breakthrough allows the user to actually transmit the feelings, thoughts and emotions that accompany and colour that experience, so that rather than merely seeing through their eyes we can, as it were, see into their head. One of the lead scientists on the project, played by Christopher Walken, has become emotionally estranged from his wife over a number of years and communication between the two has completely broken down. As they are on the verge of divorce he 'uploads' a series of happy memories of their marriage, along with the emotions that are stirred up by them, and presents it to her as a parting gift. After this seemingly impossible communication takes place they both re-experience their former love for each other and are reunited. The distance between the two is thus short-circuited and everything that they feel but cannot say to each other can now be directly *shown*.

It takes no great leap of the imagination to envisage the cognitive imaging technologies to which we have been continually returning being utilised in a manner comparable to this. Indeed the possibility of extracting something like a 'mental picture' of what one is seeing or thinking and importing it into the brain of

another is perhaps not as implausible as it sounds, given the astonishing technological advances we have already outlined. What we are really touching on, this 'feeling' or 'picture' that we could perhaps transmit through technological means is what in the philosophy of mind is termed *qualia*: the ineffable, seemingly irreducible, 'what-it-is-like-ness' of experience, which is incommensurable with mere information such as biological or chemical processes. We can describe all the physical properties of a bar of chocolate, as well as the neurochemical reactions that account for our pleasure in eating it, but this can not explain or do away with the quale: *how it feels* right now to be eating it. This is something that language is apparently incapable of expressing or describing, since I can only communicate the common words, not the unique raw sensation that I experience.

However, is this truly the case? As Wittgenstein puts it,

> Describe the aroma of coffee. – Why can't it be done? Do we lack the words? And *for what* are words lacking? – But how do we get the idea that such a description must after all be possible? Have you ever felt the lack of such a description? Have you tried to describe the aroma and not succeeded?[56]

The point is, if we each know what coffee smells like, and we each know the meaning of the English word 'coffee' then my interlocutor will know what I am talking about when I describe or refer to it and there is no failure of communication. There might be subtle variations in smell which a coffee connoisseur would detect

[56] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 610, p. 159.

and be able to articulate while a less discriminating palate would not, and there might be a particular aromatic note that we discern but cannot quite describe, but this is a mere deficiency in knowledge and not a fundamentally incommunicable quality. If we *could* identify it then we could describe or name it. But nevertheless we still feel that there is something *more*, something beyond these mere words, such as 'coffee' and its accompanying adjectives – sweet, bitter, nutty – that we experience but which necessarily escapes expression. And this 'something more' is precisely the sensation that this coffee smell incites within us, so that it is not the 'outward' smell that we wish to describe, its objective properties, but its 'inward' manifestation to consciousness. This is the point at which we believe language breaks down, for it seems that all description must end somewhere, after which all we can do is 'point' to the sensation itself. So when Wittgenstein asks, '*for what* are words lacking?' we can reply: the quale, the smell-sensation *for me*.

So if when I speak about the smell of coffee I can only communicate its 'outward' properties, what I keep within myself is how the smell of coffee is *for me*, which may be bound up with a unique network of memories and associations connected with it. But how it is *for me* is of course the only possible acquaintance I can have with the aroma itself, I can never know how the other may experience it or how it may be outside of any subjective perception whatever. So when I describe the smell of coffee perhaps we can say that what I actually *refer to* is a private, incommunicable sensation but what I *say* is the general. When the other hears this 'general' word he translates it into *his* private sensation and the concomitant associations that are stirred up. So we each have a private, incomparable sensation but communication nevertheless takes place because we each invest these words

with significance and know in our own case to which inward sensations they refer. The situation is somewhat akin to Croce's account of the art object, which is an external vehicle required only to trigger an internal intuition, effacing itself in the process.

What this kind of thinking presupposes, as Wittgenstein puts it, is that a word 'means something known to everyone; and in addition, for each person, it means something known only to him[.] (Or perhaps rather: it *refers* to something known only to him.)'[57] So when I say 'the smell of coffee' I might be led into thinking that it has an outward meaning that can be communicated, *as well as* a private, inexpressible meaning, due to the fact that each person may experience that smell differently and it is only of my own case that I can speak. It suggests a strict dichotomous relationship between the outer words that I use in order to make myself understood to others and my inner private experience, and when I say a word 'I cast a sidelong glance at the private sensation, as it were in order to say to myself: I know all right what I mean by it.'[58] On this way of thinking we can never be sure that the other, for example, sees colours in the same way we do, but we rely on a certain pragmatism in so far as we have all agreed to call this particular colour 'red', regardless of the possible variations in individual experience. So perhaps each person's experience really is incomparably unique but language divests us of that uniqueness. We each (perhaps) see red differently, and so the word 'red' means something different, private, to all of us in addition to its common, universal meaning.

[57] Ibid., § 273, p. 95.
[58] Ibid., § 274.

However, Wittgenstein compares the vacuity of declaring 'I know how red looks *to me*', or 'I know how coffee smells *to me*', to someone saying '"But I know how tall I am!" and laying his hand on top of his head to prove it.'[59] *Knowing* how tall I am has meaning only if I can refer to a stable measuring criteria, which is not to say that in the absence of such measuring devices I am heightless, or I have no idea where the top of my head stops, but only that for the concept of height to mean anything there must be an external standard of comparison. Likewise when I use the concept 'red', or 'coffee', I direct the other to the *object itself* rather than to a private sensation:

> Look at the blue of the sky and say to yourself 'How blue the sky is!' – When you do it spontaneously – without philosophical intentions – the idea never crosses your mind that this impression of colour belongs only to *you*. And you have no hesitation in exclaiming that to someone else. And if you point at anything as you say the words you point at the sky. I am saying: you have not the feeling of pointing-into-yourself, which often accompanies 'naming the sensation' when one is thinking about 'private language'.[60]

So again, just as we cannot construct a private language, so we cannot imbue common words with 'private' meaning, and the notion of there being a fundamental incommensurability across different experiential perspectives is a philosophical fiction, according to Wittgenstein.

[59] Ibid., § 279, p. 96.
[60] Ibid., § 275.

Husserl too insists upon this implicit intersubjective agreement in our experience of the external world, believing that this is the only way to guarantee objective knowledge. For unless I assume that the other's way of experiencing the world is the same as my own, not only are we unable to find common ground on which to communicate but we are each left in a state of Cartesian doubt with no way of ascertaining whether the external world as it seems to us is actually a hallucination. This is not to say that there are not 'abnormalities' or discrepancies across different subjective experiences but these are merely variations viewed against the background of a certain common range. In the words of Husserl, 'the constituting of abnormality is possible only on the basis of an intrinsically antecedent normality.'[61] Synesthesia, agnosia, even colour-blindness, all to varying degrees constitute different phenomenological experiences but such unusual cases cannot lead us to generalise the abnormal and wonder whether such a radical incongruity is in fact the norm. And if this is the case then this singular *otherness* of the other that we are orbiting around cannot be located at the level of how the world appears to him. For since intersubjectivity is only possible at all so long as we assume a certain commonality of experience, the possibility of 'seeing what the other sees' could not lead to the 'disappearance' of intersubjectivity that Žižek describes. This would only be the case if we assumed that each of us 'sees the world' fundamentally differently, but then once again there would be no intersubjective relation to overcome. It is possible to imagine, purely hypothetically, that through the administration of hallucinogenic drugs or some form of perceptual distortion we *could* experience what-it-is-like for someone with a different perceptual apparatus

[61] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977) § 55, p. 125.

than ourselves, and the fact that such a possibility can be conceived at all demonstrates that this is not a radical or insurmountable difference.

Yet nevertheless there are certain cases in our everyday experience, especially so in the feeling of romantic love touched upon above, where we *do* maintain that although we may each use the same word ('love'), each person may mean or refer to something private and incomparable by it that others could not understand (and not just because it is a peculiarly indefinable abstract term). This inarticulacy is not a mere empirical lack; it feels constitutive to the feeling *love* that we are unable adequately to communicate it. So could we conceive of transmitting this inarticulable feeling to someone else? Could we imagine communicating it to someone who did not feel the love that we do towards a particular person? Could we *show* them by making them see the loved one *as we do*, see them in their lovableness as it were? However, would this not assume that it was an isolable datum that could conceivably be detached and conveyed to another person? Is there *one* characteristic unit of sensation corresponding to this experience that could be expressed in an instant, or is it not rather an ongoing, mutable network of associations and memories that have developed into this indefinable feeling to which we give the name 'love'?

Of course this could be said not only of a feeling as singular and profound as love, but to a greater or lesser extent of every thought, sensation or feeling. For, as the above passage from the David Foster-Wallace story describes, even our most banal and commonplace experiences are intimately bound up with a whole network of our previous associations, without their being consciously dwelt upon. This is their

horizon or background and one could not detach the *thing itself* (the momentary thought or feeling) from this context without making of it a different experience. As Wittgenstein asks, '[could] one have a feeling of ardent love or hope for the space of one second – no matter what preceded or followed this second? – What is happening now has significance – in these surroundings. The surroundings give it its importance.'[62] Just as a fifty pound note has no meaning outside of a capitalist economy that invests it with value, so if we were to isolate one instant in a person's experience, interrupted from the thread of associations, hopes, expectations, memories, etc. that led up to it and will follow on from it then that momentary 'state' would not be the same moment as it is experienced by the person himself. To put the same point in Husserlian terms, the world exists for me 'only as *cogitatum* of my changing and, while changing, interconnected *cogitationes*' and hence it follows that it would not be the same *cogitatum* outside of this particular stream of *cogitationes*.[63] The phenomenon of love, as well as the word itself, as Wittgenstein puts it, 'refers to a phenomenon of human life'[64] and thus has sense only within that life. And, to again juxtapose Wittgenstein with Husserl here, the latter says something very similar when he says that 'what is experienced' in our moment to moment experience is 'nothing more than a synthetic unity inseparable from this

[62] *Philosophical Investigations*, § 583, p. 153.
[63] *Cartesian Meditations*, § 15, p. 37. Similarly, in the *Ideas I*, Husserl writes that '*no concrete mental process* can be accepted as *a self-sufficient one in the full sense*', which means that no 'content' of phenomenological experience can be taken on its own, for each moment of consciousness is what it is only within its contextual 'stream'. Furthermore, 'two *streams of* mental processes (spheres of consciousness for two pure Egos) *of an identically essential content are inconceivable*, as well as that no *completely determined* mental process of the one stream can belong to the other [...;] only mental processes of an identical inner characteristic can be common to them (although not common as individually identical), but not two mental processes which, in addition, have a "halo" absolutely alike.' Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, trans., F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982) pp. 198-9.
[64] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 583, p. 153.

life and its potentialities.'[65] The whole series of associations that make up my feeling of love towards a person (or of hope, or hatred, or enjoyment) could not be distilled into one communicable 'flash', just as the whole of someone's life could not be condensed into one second.[66]

However, perhaps dwelling on an example as loaded and as indefinable as love has made our question harder than it needed to be. We could simplify matters a great deal by considering something less 'ineffable', such as taste and asking whether we could imagine a technological system that would be capable of isolating and transmitting it to another person's brain. Suppose, then, that I find the taste of bananas unpleasant; could the experience of someone who does like that taste be transmitted to me, so that I can experience what-it-is-like to enjoy bananas? If we give credence to the philosophical notion of qualia then we would have to say that we each have a different experience of this taste of bananas, and that the distinct quality of experience for someone who loathes them is fundamentally different from that of someone who cannot get enough of them. But there is nothing in the taste of bananas that I am missing, nothing that my banana-loving friend is privy to that I am not, it is simply that we have different responses to that taste. We could imagine a conversation taking place along the lines of, 'I hate that mushiness, the

[65] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, § 47, p. 104.
[66] This 'background' of associations and memories is closely related to what in cognitive science is known as 'the frame problem', that is, the immense difficulty in replicating in a computational system the ease and speed with which we get our bearings in a situation and process or make sense of any event with which we are faced, however unexpected. For since we have gathered such an immense store of knowledge over the course of our lives, and *everything* we have learned is potentially relevant in any situation, this knowledge must be immediately accessible at all times so that it can be called upon as soon as it is required. And of course a large amount of our knowledge is entirely useless, but this must also be permanently 'on hand' in case it were needed. So in any attempt at constructing something resembling artificial intelligence, or of providing a computational model of how consciousness works, such a faculty would impose huge demands on the structuring and processing of information. Cf. W.F.G Haselager, *Cognitive Science and Folk Psychology: The Right Frame of Mind*, (London: SAGE, 1997), pp. 54-77.

lingering bitter aftertaste', to which my friend replies, 'yes, that's what I love about them!'

Dennett likens our individual discriminatory dispositions to a true story about two Soviet spies who used an ingenious password system to identify each other. Each had one half of a torn cardboard Jell-O box, and since the likelihood of someone's replicating the tear exactly is so small it acted as an infallible recognition device. Dennett's suggestion is that just as each torn piece of cardboard acts as a unique detector for its counterpart, so our distinct dispositions 'fit' the world individually and perfectly. Interestingly, he asserts that this is a reciprocal development, meaning the natural world actually meets us in the middle, each having evolved to take best advantage of the other. So just as we developed colour vision as a survival strategy, the natural world evolved a form of colour-coding in order to attract or repel animals such as us. Thus the colour fruit turns when it is ripe is that fruit's means of advertising itself to a potential seed-spreader, it having developed this quality in order to maximise its chances for reproduction and take advantage of those animals with colour-vision. There are plenty of entirely subsidiary by-products that accompany this coevolution of colour and colour-vision, and not every brightly coloured natural object is so for a reason. However, the only reason we can distinguish red rubies from green emeralds, as Dennett puts it, is because we have evolved to distinguish red from green berries. 'The fact that there is a difference *in colour* between rubies and emeralds can thus be considered to be a *derived* colour phenomenon.'[67] The point is, to an animal with a different visual apparatus, this connection between berries and rubies will not exist.

[67] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 378.

What goes for colour goes equally for sweetness and bitterness, and pleasant and foul aromas, all of which being further means of attracting or repelling, which coevolved alongside our taste and smell receptors, letting us know what it is advisable to eat and what it is not. There will of course be innumerable particular variations, such as liking or loathing bananas for example, but these are mere evolutionary quirks that serve no purpose (unless, as Dennett points out, they come to put the bearer at an advantage in some unforeseen way. If bananas turned out to be deadly, for example, people who did not like the taste would be in a better position to survive ahead of those who did.)

Because of this interlocking reciprocity that our discriminatory states establish towards the world, like the two pieces of torn cardboard, there is no *external* criteria – outside of the encounter – against which we can judge it. So if someone wants to refer to his own private qualitative experience, of red-ness for example, and say that *this is how it is for me*, '[all] that move accomplishes (at best)', says Dennett, 'is to point to his own idiosyncratic colour-discrimination state, a move that is parallel to holding up a piece of Jell-O box and saying that it detects *this* shape property.'[68]

So does it really make any sense to talk about isolating and communicating qualia, as in transmitting the 'likeableness' of bananas to someone who does not like them? Does it in fact make any sense to talk about qualia at all? We can look to a passage from Wittgenstein, which anticipates some of the points we are making here:

[68] Ibid., p. 383.

> Someone suddenly sees an appearance which he does not recognise (it may be a familiar object, but in an unusual position or lighting); the lack of recognition perhaps lasts only a few seconds. Is it correct to say he has a different visual experience from someone who knew the object at once?[69]

The answer would be that it both is and is not correct. If a song starts playing and I do not recognise it while the person sitting next to me does, the auditory sensation we each experience is the same (supposing neither person's hearing is impaired) but we both respond differently to it. So the song is the same but our experience of it is qualitatively different, just as the way we 'hear' a song for the hundredth time strikes us as different to how we 'hear' it the first (or the way we drive along a street for the *n*th time is different to how we negotiate it the first time.) This is because each individual's 'complex of reactive dispositions' is peculiar to that person and our own such states are not fixed and immutable but adapt and change over time as we learn. And so all that could ever conceivably be communicated in a real-world equivalent of the *Brainstorm* technology would be the taste *itself*, or the visual stimulus *itself*. Since there is no transcendent what-it-is-like-ness that corresponds to the quality 'liking bananas' or 'disliking bananas', merely the individual reactions of our taste receptors to one and the same taste, I will still not like the taste of bananas even if I experience it by proxy, 'through' the experience of someone else who does like it. There is no information that could be made available to me that would transform my experience, for we each taste the *same thing*, which is to say the taste manifests itself identically to each of us and we simply have different responses to it. This may lead to our wanting to say

[69] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, IIxi, p. 197.

something like the '*objective* quality' is the same while the '*subjective* quality' is different, but, aside from the absurdity of speaking of *objectivity* where taste is concerned, this really says no more than that one of us likes it while the other does not; there is no need to invent an additional terminology. All of this of course goes equally in the case of love. Love is not predicated on a certain *knowledge* as if, as the Phil Spector song goes, 'to know him is to love him'. I do not love somebody because I know something about him or her that a third person does not, or because I simply know them better than anyone else does. The other may know everything there is to know about the object of our love and yet still not be able to feel how we do. Thus the quote attributed to Nicomachus with which we have opened this section ('Behold her with my eyes…') is not as if to say 'if you *knew* her the way I know her you would feel as I do', but is rather the tautologous, 'if you felt the way I do about her you would feel as I do'. There is nothing that the other person is missing in his experience of my beloved that could be made evident to him in a flash of realisation.

However, perhaps an even more crucial point concerning the possibility or conceivability of gaining access to another's first-person experience is that even supposing, ignoring all of the objections we have so far encountered, that we *could* upload an experience or feeling such as that of 'love' to a database as Christopher Walken's scientist does, and enable the other to experience it for themselves, this would still not truly be *my* feeling of love that the other experiences but his own. For even if it is (originally) 'my' multifarious network of memories, feelings and associations that he is able to feel – meaning he actually feels them first hand rather than viewing or gaining knowledge of them – they would still be experienced as if

they were his own. He now perhaps knows what it would be like were *he* to feel the love that *I* do and to have had the memories and feelings that *I* have had but what he still does not know (first hand) is what this experience is like *for me*. And surely if the faculty of telepathy is indeed to effect such a radical penetration into the other as to overcome their very otherness then this is the decisive obstacle that would need to be negotiated. It is not an enrichment of my own experience that I would be looking for but an insight into the experience of another. Thus, once again, it should not be a matter of gaining empathetic understanding into what it would be like *for me* to experience what he is experiencing but precisely to see what it is like *for him*.[70]

In Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman's film *Being John Malkovich* (1999), there famously exists a magical cupboard door which leads directly into the mind of the actor John Malkovich, but the way this is experienced for the successive inhabitants of Malkovich's mind (which is perhaps the only way it could possibly be *experienced* as such – we will come back to this) is as if the actor were a puppet or a machine and they were the 'ghost in the machine', seeing through his eyes and directing his movements but still as themselves, occupying his body. What we are

[70] In § 302 (p. 101) of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes:

> If one has to imagine someone else's pain on the model of one's own, this is none too easy a thing to do: for I have to imagine pain which I *do not feel* on the model of the pain which I *do feel*. That is, what I have to do is not simply to make a transition in imagination from one place of pain to another. As, from pain in the hand to pain in the arm. For I am not to imagine that I feel pain in some region of his body. (Which would also be possible.)

This is an exceedingly tricky passage to fathom, seeming at once completely straightforward and bafflingly obtuse. For I can and do all the time imagine pain I do not feel 'on the model of' pain I do feel, as when I wince at the sight of a nasty injury. However, following Søren Overgaard's reading in his excellent book *Wittgenstein and Other Minds: Rethinking Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity with Wittgenstein, Levinas, and Husserl*, (London & New York: Routledge 2007) pp. 94-102, we can see that what we are being asked to imagine here is how we could feel someone else's pain without making it *our own* pain; thus me feeling his pain not as my own but *as his*. Italicising the second 'I' in the sentence 'For I am not to imagine that *I* feel pain in some region of his body' makes the sense, and the problem, somewhat clearer.

trying to conceive here is whether and how we could *really be* John Malkovich – that is, to not be *ourselves* experiencing a day in his life. As Derrida puts it, this is where original finitude...

> makes its appearance in an irreducibly open question which is the *philosophical question in general*: *why* is the essential, irreducible, absolutely general and unconditioned form of experience as a venturing forth towards the other still egoity? *Why* is an experience which would not be lived as *my own* (for an ego in general, in the eidetic-transcendental sense of these words) impossible and unthinkable? This unthinkable and impossible are the limits of reason in general. In other words: why finitude, if, as Schelling had said, 'egoity is the general principle of finitude'?[71]

The Experience of the Other

In the Fifth of the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl turns his attention to transcendental intersubjectivity, applying the phenomenological method to the experience or constitution of the 'alter-ego', or the other. As we have already alluded to, much of the problem centres on how we are to rescue objective knowledge of the external world once we have performed the transcendental reduction, which restricts us to the interiority of our phenomenological presentations. The answer Husserl proposes is that this knowledge is secured through intersubjective agreement – through my knowing that there are other openings onto the world exactly like my own and thus that the world as it is for me

[71] Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', *Writing and Difference*, p. 163.

is shared by others.[72] But before we can proceed to this stage we must first have encountered these other egos, who are 'surely not a mere intending and intended *in me*, merely synthetic unities of possible verification *in me*, but, according to their sense, precisely *others*'.[73] The other qua other opening onto the world and guarantor of that world cannot be incorporated as merely a moment of my own consciousness without thereby sacrificing that very quality that constitutes him as another ego. Yet how am I to have an experience of something definitively outside of me and still preserve that very externality? Without by any means following all of the intricacies of Husserl's reasoning we will draw out a few aspects that are particularly pertinent to our problem.

What Husserl repeatedly insists upon throughout is the insuperable condition of 'ownness' that characterises all experience. This means that every thought, every perceived object, every sensation is such only if it is experienced as '*peculiarly my own*'.[74] This is obviously not a form of Berkleyan idealism, and nor does 'my ownness' equate to 'my own creation' as in a kind of intellectual intuition. Rather it is the basic truism that the only experience I can ever undergo is always, inescapably, *my* experience. This fact of being 'trapped in our own perspective' and unable to see outside of ourselves is of the essence of our finitude. However, just as earlier we could not rid ourselves of intersubjectivity and gain access to that kernel of selfhood which, outside of the sphere of universality, belonged to me alone, so now it seems that starting from the other side the problem has been reversed. For if we assert that everything only *is* so long as it is *for me* then the existence of other

[72] We encountered this position briefly in chapter 2 as the object of Quentin Meillassoux's critique. But since our interest is not in the intersubjective constitution of reality per se but in the encounter with the other itself these reservations are not pertinent here.
[73] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, § 42, p. 89.
[74] Ibid., § 44, p. 95.

minds seems at best to be mere conjecture, and we are consequently left with a transcendental solipsism. So from whichever side we start out – intersubjectivity on the one hand and monadic subjectivity on the other – it seems we are incapable of accounting for the other side. However, this apparent relapse into solipsism that seems to ensue when we follow the phenomenological method is precisely what Husserl means to refute here. For insisting on the insurmountability of one's own experience is by no means to deny intersubjectivity but is rather to secure it; this is in fact its founding condition. As Husserl puts it, '[the] only conceivable manner in which others can have for me the sense and status of existent others, thus and so determined, consists in their being constituted *in me* as others.'[75] Any experience of another subject, any 'venturing forth' unto the other must still be *my* experience otherwise it is not an *experience* at all. So any and every encounter with the other must necessarily hold back from the other *himself*; my experience can never reach all the way out. All the knowledge I have of him remains a part of *me* rather than of him as such, and so in a certain important respect I never truly encounter the other; at least not *directly*.

This is where Husserl is fundamentally at odds with Levinas, the latter accusing this Husserlian account of intersubjectivity of doing violence to the other, and making of him merely an object of my consciousness. For Levinas, the other is not in any respect an alter-ego (in the sense that I view him as another like myself), for it is not a case of starting with my own subjectivity and working outwards. To be sure, for Levinas also we do not 'reach all the way out' and gain access to the other in his innermost being, but in the face-to-face relation with the other he gives me 'more

[75] Ibid., § 56, p. 128.

than I contain.'[76] This is what Levinas terms 'teaching' as opposed to maieutics, which merely awakens within me what was already there lying dormant. The other comes to me from a veritable outside; he is presented to me as *absolutely* exterior, rather than the relative externality of objects, which, while retaining a certain autonomy are nevertheless presented *within* me as being outside of me. In the case of the other, however, he is never 'within' me in this way as a thought or representation of mine, for this could only ever reduce him to 'the same', to being something that I contain. So rather than being an object of cognition, the *noema* in the case of the other 'overflows the capacity of thought'.[77] The only mark or presence of the other within my subjective space *is* his very transcendence and infinite externality: 'The distance that separates *ideatum* and idea here constitutes the content of the *ideatum* itself.'[78] This means that there is not a psychic content corresponding to 'the other' and *in addition* the sense of a further unexplored horizon as in Husserl's account of perception. Rather, the very distance or transcendence of the other from any concept, knowledge or experience I can have of him forms the content itself. The other qua other *is* this infinite excess or overflow.

Now in order for there to be this excess there must be a 'point of departure'[79] from which it takes flight – put differently, the infinite overflowing of thought needs the thought that it overflows – and Levinas often asserts that alterity 'is only possible starting from *me*'.[80] It follows that the relationship to the other is such only for an *I* that remains itself and does not dissolve in the relationship. The quarrel, then,

[76] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 51.
[77] Ibid., p. 49.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., p. 36.
[80] Ibid., p. 40.

between these two accounts circulates around *how* the other is presented to this *I*, and how to maintain the other's externality within this presentation. This, as we have seen, was already Husserl's stated problem and so by no means something he was blind to, but Levinas' contention is that the attempt results in failure, for the other's *infinite* externality is reduced to the merely qualified externality of objecthood. All of Levinas' beautifully lyrical analyses of the face-to-face relation are oriented around articulating an alternative description that does full justice to the other in his alterity and does not result in objectification.

This relation of the face-to-face is, says Levinas, 'totally different from *experience* in the sensible sense of the term, relative and egoist'.[81] The face is 'neither seen nor touched – for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the *I* envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content.'[82] This is the violence that Levinas ascribes to Husserl's account: the *I* exerting domination over the other by making of him merely a modification of my own consciousness. Again, for Levinas the other is never *given* to me as the content of my thought, 'he maintains a relation with me' but 'he remains absolute within the relation.'[83] The relation is therefore 'maintained without violence, in peace with this absolute alterity'[84] and exteriority is never converted into interiority.

[81] Ibid., p. 193. [My italics.] More than a decade earlier, in the essay *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994), Levinas writes 'experience always already signifies knowledge, light, and initiative, as well as the return of the object to the subject.' p. 70. This is why death is likewise not an experience, of which we will have more to say later.
[82] Ibid., p. 194.
[83] Ibid., p. 195.
[84] Ibid., p. 197.

We have been trying to consider how we could gain access to the other's ownmost experience without thereby wresting it back into *my* experience, but here Levinas seems to suggest that we are on the wrong tack with such an approach. For since an experience can only ever belong to *me,* it is wrong to speak of an experience at all where the other is concerned. The other is infinitely irreducible to a subjective event for me. Thus not only do I never experience the other 'himself', but I never *experience* the other at all, since the other is never something that happens to me but something that remains infinitely outside of me. So we can still say that all experience remains *my* experience, but if we follow Levinas we must add that the other can never be a part or moment of this experience. However, if it is not *my* experience in the face-to-face encounter do we already have what we are looking for? Is not every encounter with the other already a surpassing or negating of my own experience and a presentation of the other *in person,* i.e., immediately?

But this entails further questions, for if my encounter with the other is not an 'experience', which is the essence of my ownness, how am I still to hold onto the *I* and not let it dissolve in the relationship? Where am 'I' in this face-to-face relation? How do we preserve 'this radical heterogeneity'[85] unless I hold fast to my experience and the other likewise? If the other is not somehow a part of *my* meaningful existence, if he remains entirely external to any cognition or perception I can have of him then how is he to present himself to me at all? How can I talk about the other as such unless he is the other *for me*? For unless the *I* collapses altogether into the other the only alternative through which he would remain wholly outside of my experience is if I have no encounter with him at all.

[85] Ibid., p. 294.

Derrida, coming to Husserl's defence, judges that Levinas 'deprives himself of the very foundation and possibility of his own language' by 'refusing to acknowledge an intentional modification of the ego – which would be a violent and totalitarian act for him'.[86] For even though Levinas insists upon the 'point of departure' in the relationship (the *I*), he cannot account for how the infinitely other appears from this vantage point unless it is as an 'intentional modification of the ego' – his appearance in and for me, which, as Husserl shows, is appearance *tout court*. Thus a certain violence is irreducible according to Derrida, and there is no 'peaceful' encounter with the other that would not coincide with the worst violence – again, either the total absorption of one into the other or the negation of the face to face encounter altogether. He can only ever be presented to me as a moment of myself and never as absolutely, or infinitely, other. This violence is pre-ethical and opens the possibility of ethics, in that prior to it there would be no intersubjective relation to speak of. Furthermore, as Derrida here contends, it is only if we follow Husserl and view the other as precisely an alter-ego, 'like myself', that we do justice to him in his alterity. For '[if] the other was not recognised as an ego, its entire alterity would collapse.'[87]

So it seems we have reached a certain limit, and the only way for the other to appear to me in any kind of relationship ('face to face' or 'mind to mind') would be in and through my own experience. Perhaps the telepathic relationship we have been seeking, which would present the other to me absolutely and without mediation, is the Levinasian ideal of the peaceful encounter. For if I yearn to access

[86] Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics', p. 156.
[87] Ibid.

the other from his own perspective and not from mine, it is because we surely see this as being the only truly non-violent relationship: rather than him appearing to me and for me, he would be present for himself, able to 'speak for himself' without intermediary. But, to reiterate, this could only be accomplished as the worst form of violence – either to myself or to the other. It is thus only by doing justice to Husserl's account, against Levinas' critique, that we guarantee respect for the other in his otherness. Were I to 'depart' from myself and enter into the other's phenomenological interior absolutely this would indeed destroy intersubjectivity, but not by making the other into the absolutely transparent object of my cognition as Žižek describes, but rather by my collapsing entirely into his subjectivity and losing this sphere of 'my ownness'. For how could I experience another's phenomenological inner-space, as *they* experience it, while simultaneously maintaining an external perspective? This desire to see the world through another's eyes, or 'experience' an experience that is not our own is similar to the nostalgic wish to go back and relive a point in our own history; in both cases we do not really know what it is we are wishing for. For we would ask, do you want to witness or observe this moment as if from the outside? To which the answer would be, 'No, that is not enough. I want to *experience* it, to live it again!' But then if you do 'experience' it you lose the external vantage point that bestows the memory with the value you now attach to it and simply live it as if for the first time. Therefore you would not be *re*-living it as a past experience but simply *living* it. There is no compromise or middle point between these two 'points of departure', it is a simple case of one or the other. If we envisage a compromise to be a kind of 'living through' the experience, where you perform the actions and say the words that the younger version of yourself said and did in this hypothetical past event while

remaining the 'present' self observing it as you are doing it, you still are not reliving it in the way that you wish, there remains an irreducible distance, as with the various occupants of the mind of John Malkovich. So either you *experience* it and consequently do not experience it (from your present vantage point) or you merely *witness* it from outside and do not experience it. Returning to the question of experiencing another's thoughts as they are experienced in the other, either I retain the distance of an external observer, and consequently I do not *experience* it (first hand), or I do gain first-hand access but at the cost of dissolving my own subjectivity into theirs and consequently *I* do not experience it. I am either on one side or the other, but the wish is to somehow straddle the divide: to experience his experience while simultaneously maintaining a certain distance, a certain selfhood, which is an impossible hybrid comparable to the Sartrean In-Itself-For-Itself, or God.

So, for Husserl, in our knowledge of the other a '*certain mediacy of intentionality* must be present', which is termed 'appresentation'. The other is *appresented* but never *given*, for if he were given, 'if what belongs to the other's essence were directly accessible, it would be merely a moment of my own essence, and ultimately he himself and I myself would be the same.'[88] The other can never be immediately presented to me without disappearing altogether, and if I *were* to gain this impossible access, the very instant it is consummated the other evaporates:

> Whatever can become presented, and evidently verified, *originally* – is something *I* am; or else it belongs to me as peculiarly my own. Whatever,

[88] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, § 50, p. 109.

> by virtue thereof, is experienced in that founded manner which characterises a primordially unfulfillable experience – an experience that does not give something itself originally but that consistently verifies something indicated – is 'other'.[89]

As soon as I access the subjectivity of the other *immediately* (as soon as he is presented rather than appresented), the other becomes a part of myself and intersubjectivity collapses. So even though telepathy would perhaps bring us to the closest point just short of an immediate encounter, the two communicating subjects would still 'absolve themselves from the relation'[90] that they enter into; otherwise there would be no relation as such, they would maintain absolute communion. But our insistence upon the inescapability and the finitude of this quality of ownness need not necessarily equate to solipsism. In fact, as Søren Overgaard stresses, would it not be the other option that amounts to the truly solipsistic position? For if I were not condemned to access the world only through my own individual perspective this would condemn me to the '*solitude* of being the owner of *all* perspectives.'[91]

From Telepathy to Teleiopoesis

This is how we should understand the following passage from Derrida's essay 'Telepathy':

[89] Ibid., § 52, 114-5.
[90] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 64.
[91] Overgaard, *Wittgenstein and Other Minds*, p. 102.

> For here is my latest paradox, which you alone will understand clearly: it is because there would be telepathy that a postcard can always not arrive at its destination. The ultimate naivety would be to allow oneself to think that Telepathy guarantees a destination that 'posts and telecommunications' fail to assure. On the contrary, everything I said about the postcarded structure of the mark (interference, parasiting, divisibility, iterability, and so on) is found in the network. This goes for any tele-system – whatever its content, form, or medium.[92]

Without entering into a discussion of the strategic terms Derrida here employs – '(interference, parasiting, divisibility, iterability, and so on)' – we can begin to grasp the meaning more clearly if we juxtapose it with a statement from the early work *Speech and Phenomena*:

> Everything in my speech which is destined to manifest an experience to another must pass by the mediation of its physical side; this irreducible mediation involves every expression in an indicative function.[93]

No matter how clearly a person may express themselves the mediating sign is never transparent and my interlocutor's 'lived experience' is never present to me in itself but only through traversing and 'to some degree [losing] itself in, the opaqueness of a body'.[94] Because of this 'irreducible mediation' communication can never be ideal or perfect, there is always a certain interpretative necessity on behalf of the receiver and hence the ever-present possibility of failure or misunderstanding. I

[92] 'Telepathy', p. 239.
[93] *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 38.
[94] Ibid.

may hear a perfectly innocent remark as a sarcastic gibe, or I might take literally a merely hollow offer such as a dinner invitation. At first glance, however, this recourse to externality would seemingly be bypassed or negated in the case of telepathic communication, where it is a matter of one mind communicating with another (apparently) without mediation. For telepathic communication, as a means of 'instant' delivery seems to establish a direct connection between subjects, and if the other can encounter my thought for himself then the possibility of misunderstanding is surely overcome. However, for all of the reasons we have outlined so far this is an untenable proposition, which is tantamount to saying that mediation remains irreducible.

An interesting related question is whether one could *lie* in thought, or whether the ability to 'read someone's mind' entails always knowing whether or not they are telling the truth. Sartre writes that, '[by] the lie consciousness affirms that it exists by nature as *hidden from the Other*; it utilises for its own profit the ontological duality of myself and myself in the eyes of the Other.'[95] But again, would a telepathic insight not see behind the curtain and perceive the insincerity, thus overcoming (in part) the other's hiddenness? Once more, the television series *Heroes* provides us with the perfect example of how *not* to envisage this possibility when in one scene a character *says* one thing – out loud – and *thinks* another, which the telepathic character of course is able to 'hear'. But a lie is not like a box that contains something different to what it says on the label. I do not, for example, think 'no' and say 'yes', I simply *say* that which is not the case or that which I do not really think or believe. As Wittgenstein would say, there is nothing internal, in

[95] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 72.

addition to the utterance, which accompanies it – except perhaps a feeling of guilt or unease, but then this would be manifest (to the astute observer, or the polygraph) in my *behaviour*. No matter how far we may penetrate the other's consciousness we will always remain on the outside, and always in the position of interpreting 'external' behaviour. Nowhere will we reach a decisive core at which his meaning or his sincerity may be finally determined.

So all communication, any 'tele-system' whatever, must 'go via the stars'[96] before reaching (or not) its destination. As long as the two egos are '*separated* by an abyss I cannot actually cross'[97] as Husserl puts it, then no form of absolute communion could ever take place and no communication will ever be ideal; but if this abyss *were* to be crossed – or closed altogether – then it would mean the end for one or other of us and hence the end of communication. Thus we could say in Derridean language that this gap or abyss is both the opening and the limit of communication. Telepathy, again, perhaps brings us to the extreme edge of the abyss, the point at which we come closest to passing over into the other side, but this is also the point at which it presents itself all the more insistently as absolutely un-negotiable. So if anything this abyssal gap between subjects would be *more* pronounced in the case of telepathy than in sensory communication precisely because by circumventing what *seems* to constitute the obstacle – space, the sense-organs, the constraints of language – and bringing one mind 'directly' into contact with another, the very impossibility of realising this immediacy confronts us – 'directly', if it is possible to speak of an immediacy of mediation. For, as we have intimated above, there would be no way back once we had crossed the limit; or if we did come 'back to

[96] Derrida, 'Telepathy', p. 239.
[97] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, § 55, p. 121.

our senses' there would be no way of integrating this out of body (or, rather, out of mind) experience into our own stream of consciousness without assimilating it, that is without making it into *my own* experience. It would become either a blind spot or just a memory of something that happened to *me*, and not a memory of somebody else's experience.

So we could say that the fact that I can be understood at all through the opaqueness of the mediating body, the fact that my meaning can ever traverse this abyss and you can 'know what I am thinking', this itself involves a minimum of telepathy in the etymological sense of *to touch at a distance*. Brain-to-brain communication would then be a special case of a general telepathy. If the 'destination' were guaranteed in advance then there would be no delivery at all, the sender and recipient would be one and the same. So for all communication, a certain distance, and hence a certain telepathy, is necessary.

However, what are we to make of those scattered instances where Derrida speaks of a message that *includes* its destination within it, a letter that 'carries its address along and implies in advance, in its very readability, the signature of the addressee'? This is a message which involves, incorporates, implies its reader or hearer. Yet how can this be so without already guaranteeing its arrival? And after what we have just seen, if the recipient were already assured and fixed in advance how could we even speak of a delivery? As Derrida describes it, '[here] is an arrow whose flight would consist in a return to the bow: fast enough, in sum, never to have left it'. So does anything even take place here if the letter is never posted, or the arrow never leaves the bow? Seemingly so, for '[it] will nevertheless have

reached us, struck home; it will have taken some time'. Travelling at an 'infinite or nil speed', this seemingly paradoxical 'absolute economy' Derrida labels *teleiopoesis*, in the sense that it '*renders* absolute, perfect, completed, accomplished, finished', while remaining at a 'distance at one remove'.[98]

There is a certain instantaneity to this teleiopoetic effect, or even better it 'advances backwards; it outruns itself by reversing itself.'[99] This is a performative structure unlike any other (which Derrida elsewhere calls an 'absolute performative'[100]), whereby the announcement or the prediction of the event will already have made it occur. *What* is said or thought happens by virtue of being said or thought. So it is not enough, Derrida writes in 'Telepathy', to 'foresee or to predict what would happen one day'. Rather what is in question is how to think 'what would happen by the very fact of being predicted or foreseen, a sort of beautiful apocalypse telescoped, kaleidoscoped, triggered off at that very moment by the precipitation of the announcement itself, consisting precisely in this announcement'.[101] Thinking through the effective force of the prediction itself, the 'mighty power' of the 'might' (exploiting to the full the double meaning of this word, as strength and as uncertainty – 'it might happen'), would allow us to 'see the difference between *make come* and *let come* vanish at an infinite speed.'[102]

This concept of teleiopoesis is developed in *The Politics of Friendship* through a reading of Nietzsche and his call in *Beyond Good and Evil* for a new breed of

[98] All quotations in the present paragraph from *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 2005), p. 32.
[99] Ibid.
[100] *H.C. for Life, That Is to Say…*, trans Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006) p. 104.
[101] 'Telepathy', p. 227.
[102] *H.C. for Life, That Is to Say…*, p. 66.

philosophers of the future.[103] Nietzsche speaks *to* these future philosophers, and *for* them. He predicts their arrival, announces their presence on the horizon and calls out, beckons, or appeals to them. But as we have just seen, the question is not one of the accuracy or verifiability of this prediction but of what is produced, constituted, effected 'by the very fact of being predicted or foreseen':

> Nietzsche renews the call; he puts through – from a different place – this teleiopoetic or telephone call to philosophers of a new species. To those of us who already are such philosophers, for in saying that he sees them coming, in saying that they are coming, in feigning to record their coming […], he is calling, he is asking, in sum, 'that they come' in the future. But to be able to say this, from the standpoint of the presumed signer, these new philosophers – from the standpoint of what is being written, from where *we* (Nietzsche and his followers) are writing to one another – must already have arrived.[104]

This is an intricate, circuitous structure whose complexity only increases the further we interrogate it. On the one hand, the call announces and constitutes the called: Nietzsche's prophetic address includes in advance those heirs to whom it is addressed, and delimits the space in which they can appear; the prediction thus brings about its own realisation. The moment it is read and understood it will

[103] This concept of Derrida's is also put to work in the context of comparative literature in the second chapter of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), where she writes that teleiopoesis 'in all moments of decision makes the task of reading imperative and yet indecisive.' p. 31. See also J. Hillis Miller's previously mentioned book *The Medium is the Maker*, where the telepathic/teleiopoetic structure is related to the power of television advertising and news stories to bring about the events they fictionally represent, e.g. in the manufacturing of needs and beliefs. p. 73.

[104] Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, p. 34-5.

always have been addressed to that very reader who now understands it, but nothing guarantees that anyone *will* understand the call or be there to hear it, which is a first reason why the message can include its reader without thereby ensuring a determined destination. This accounts for the messianic structure that Derrida ascribes to the teleiopoetic effect, for when praying for the Messiah to come or wondering when he will arrive I am addressing myself *to* the Messiah, 'here and now, to inquire when he will come.'[105] In so doing I establish myself as his 'herald and precursor',[106] so whenever the Messiah or philosopher of the future does arrive (and again, nothing guarantees that he will) the call will have *already* addressed him, only him, no matter how much time may have passed between call and response.

But on the other hand this is not a simply unilateral movement, with the reader deciding to try and live up to Nietzsche's demand and become the person described or announced. For if someone is able to hear this call then she *already is* the philosopher of the future whom Nietzsche prophesies; if she were not she would fail to understand it, and the appeal would fall on deaf ears. So this recipient does not simply and straightforwardly *succeed* Nietzsche as his disciple. Even as Nietzsche writes his appeal, his interlocutor must 'already have arrived', for in speaking *to* this other, the other 'precedes', 'informs'[107] and 'inspires'[108] the sender. Thus it is not a unidirectional communication, which *starts* with Nietzsche and *ends* with the recipient. Already the order of succession of the teleiopoetic event is

[105] Ibid., p. 37.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., p. 42.
[108] Ibid., p. 41.

unstable: once Nietzsche pens this address the *subsequent* addressees will have already preceded it.

And as we saw in our first chapter with the three identical statements from De Kooning, Cage and Borges about the reversal of influence ('every writer creates his own precursors'), there is a further reciprocal exchange at work. It is not simply that the writer, artist or philosopher of the future will hear something – in Nietzsche or, say, Herman Melville for example – that nobody else has yet heard, for this assumes that the call resounded *prior* to its being heard and was merely waiting for a response. As such the subsequent artist would not truly have *created* his or her precursors but merely been more attentive to them than others. Rather, if we are to do justice to the circuitous path of teleiopoesis, we might say that in hearing the message she effects the sending of it, recalling that strange temporality of the Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* that we saw previously, where an event is only retroactively constituted as a 'cause' by the 'effect'. So the receipt of the message by the addressee does not leave the sender (and the message itself) untouched. Not only is it the *saying* that acts as a 'doing', but the *hearing* likewise has a certain performativity.[109]

[109] Derrida elsewhere writes of the necessity of a countersignature provided by the reader of a text, which comes to divide and complicate the simple origin of the 'primary' signature, such that it cannot be said who preceded whom: 'It is thus from the countersignature that a signature is properly carried off. And it is in the instant when it is thus carried off that *there is text*. You therefore no longer know which of the two partners will have signed first.' *Signéponge/Signsponge*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) p. 130. Also, in the roundtable discussion following his paper on Nietzsche titled 'Otobiographies', Derrida says, 'the signature becomes effective – performed and performing – not at the moment it apparently takes place, but only later, when ears will have managed to receive the message. In some way the signature will take place on the addressee's side, that is, on the side of him or her whose ear will be keen enough to hear my name, for example, or to understand my signature, that with which I sign.' Trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *The Ear of the Other* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985) p. 50.

However, before we risk placing too much emphasis on the hearer or the recipient we must insist again that it is still the case that the addressee is *included* in the message, and that the one who hears it understands herself to have been predicted or prophesied. She is answering to a call that pre-existed her. But only *in* and *by means of* the arrival is it constituted as *already* having been sent. This complex backwards and forwards in time (the before that comes after) also pertains to the identity of the addressee. For even though there must be a certain quality of already-ness to the recipient, as we have said – otherwise she would not be equipped to receive the call – nevertheless the 'me' that hears is only 'already there' *after* I have heard the call. All of this accounts for the backwards travel of the arrow: *the moment it arrives it will already have arrived*. If the call sent out (by Nietzsche or whomever) were known in advance then nothing would transpire in this movement, nothing would truly be heard. I can only hear it, receive it, take it on board, if it is not already known to me. Thus, Derrida speaks in 'Telepathy' of a letter that would be...

> launched toward some unknown addressee at the moment of its writing, an addressee *unknown to himself or herself*, if one can say that, and who is *determined*, as you very well know how to be, *on receipt of the letter*; […] this is quite another thing than the transfer of a message. Its content and its end no longer precede it.[110]

In reading Nietzsche's call to future philosophers and sensing/deciding that it 'speaks to me', that he is addressing me, there is of course a certain recognition, a

[110] 'Telepathy', p. 228-9. [My italics.]

feeling that it awakens something in me that is already familiar. In other words I must be hospitable to it in order to receive the message in the first place. But although I feel this evident familiarity, the thoughts or feelings that it gives rise to within me did not precede the receipt of the message. Only *after* receiving it do I have the sense that I felt that way all along. If I am deeply affected by the work of a great writer like Proust and feel as if he speaks directly to my innermost private experience I can imagine that it was written for me and to me.[111] Proust *telepathically* knew what I am thinking and how I feel. However, if this recognition pertained to something that I *simply* already knew then reading Proust would hold nothing for me, it would merely be a succession of trite sentiments and truisms. So again, only *after* the receipt of the message will I have *already known* what it has to tell me.[112] However, we must reiterate the complex reciprocity and circuitousness of this relationship, for through my reading the sender and the message itself are altered. This is not only true in the case of a highly accomplished reader of Proust like Walter Benjamin for example, but even on a banal level, the meaning it has in the context of my life, the significance I bestow upon it cannot have preceded my reading it. Yet *once* I read it, it was already there waiting for me, for the words do not change.[113] 'In this encounter the destiny of a life is knotted, of several lives at

[111] As Nicholas Royle, paraphrasing Derrida, puts it, '[difficult] to imagine a theory of fiction, a theory of the novel, without a theory of telepathy. Starting perhaps from the hypothesis that fiction is, in some radical sense, incapable of non-telepathic representation; starting from the thought that the telepathic founds the very possibility of character, characterisation, etc. – from the "omniscient narrator" onwards'. *Telepathy and Literature*, p. 17. In the chapter 'The "Telepathy Effect"' in *The Uncanny*, Royle develops this notion further, suggesting that the inescapably theological motif of omniscience should be replaced by a concept of telepathy. pp. 256-76.

[112] This is the difference between a good observational comedian and a bad one: the good one plays on the subsequently-already known, inducing a sense of recognition through the unfamiliar; the bad one simply repeats to us that which we knew already.

[113] The reference to Proust has further pertinence, for one could say of *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* that it too 'advances backwards' and 'begins at the end', owing to its often remarked-upon circular structure: at the end of the novel it will have been the book to come that is now promised, and the narrator will have been the author.

the same time'.[114] The sender is therefore the 'split effect' rather than the 'simple origin of teleiopoesis.'[115] Prior to the teleiopoetic effect neither the sender nor the receiver (qua sender and receiver) are fully constituted subjects; they only become the selves that they maintain in the relationship *through* the relationship.[116]

We can see now that this magical symbiotic (telepathic) relationship is not limited to such exceptional cases as predicting the coming of the Messiah or the philosopher of the future, or responding to the work of a great artist, but can have general applicability. In friendship, or in a love affair, both parties – the 'me' and the 'you' – are to a large extent constituted in and by that very relationship. This is evidenced in a superficial manner by the way in which friends or lovers start to pick up on one another's mannerisms, develop a shared sense of humour, and how we often 'behave differently' when we are among different friends.

When I address the other as a friend for the first time, if he or she answers to it in friendship then a certain backwards leap will have taken place: we will already have been friends. 'You say "me" the unique addressee and everything begins between us. Starting out from nothing'.[117] Whatever the common ground which pre-exists our becoming friends (we attended the same school, we have shared interests), the moment the bond of friendship is made these matters will have been irrelevant. They cannot be the *cause*, since there were others with the same interests, the same experiences whom I do not count as friends, and we can cease to

[114] Derrida, 'Telepathy', p. 228.
[115] *The Politics of Friendship*, p. 32.
[116] Nicholas Royle suggests that deconstruction itself can be regarded as a form of telepathy, or telepathic relation – namely, the way Derrida 'inhabits' other writers and philosophers, such that it is often not clear who is speaking when. This is nowhere more true than in the essay 'Telepathy' itself, where Derrida sometimes writes 'as' Freud, in the first person. *After Derrida*, pp, 68-9.
[117] Derrida, 'Telepathy', p. 229.

share these interests without thereby ceasing to be friends (indeed with many of the friends we have retained from childhood we may no longer have anything in common other than our friendship itself.) Thus it is founded on a void: the 'me' that addresses you as a friend and the 'you' that answers are constituted the moment the address is received, for again, within this relationship neither is who they are or were outside of it. Consequently the addressee remains 'unknown' even when I *do* know the identity of the person to whom I have spoken, for in answering it he or she will not be who they were prior to it. Likewise I, as sender, am transformed. Hence this aforementioned leap, from which 'everything begins between us.' This is again a strangely cyclical movement, where, in the case of the picking up of the other's mannerisms, I imitate you imitating me imitating you, etc.

We considered earlier the experience of the 'receiver' in telepathic communication and wondered how that transmitted content would be manifested to thought. We there suggested that telepathy would muddy the waters of the sender-receiver relationship and problematise the notion of there being an 'originator' of the thought. Here the situation is the same, it is an active passivity and a passive activity. We 'give by receiving',[118] and 'make come' by 'letting come'.[119] So we can say that although telepathy/teleiopoesis would not and could not enable me to hurdle the abyss separating me from another, what it does enable is for me to enter into a relationship with the other where we, to some extent, become one. We each give birth to something that belongs to both of us, is shared between us, and that neither of us possesses outside of that relationship. Freud insists on the distinction between 'telepathy' and 'thought transference', conceding the latter while rejecting

[118] Ibid.
[119] *H.C. for Life, That Is to Say…* p. 66.

the former, and the conception of thought transference that Freud develops retains and requires a direction of travel – the repressed wish of one is transported to the other. The concept of telepathy developed by Derrida on the other hand denies such an agency between stable identities. It is no longer even a matter of intersubjectivity, which implies a certain occasionalism, and would be a merely external relationship between isolated, fully constituted subjects. However, this cyclical symbiosis remains a closeness in distance, attested to once again by the *tele-* in telepathy/teleiopoesis. I cannot take the other's place, nor he mine, and responding to this address or answering the call, 'which you are invited to do to the best of your ability […] remains your absolutely and irreplaceably singular responsibility.'[120] Whether and how we respond can only be assumed by the respondent themselves, there is no programme or guarantee.[121]

Responsibility, Freedom, Death: The Aporia of Ownness

This question of responsibility brings us back to the earlier quotation from Kant's second *Critique*. There we suggested that freedom, which is tied to the moral law, is that which makes my life truly my own; that singular individuality that Kierkegaard suggests is concealed by the generality of language is my very spontaneity. This freedom, as freedom from natural determinants, means that nothing can abrogate me from my responsibility: if I commit a wrongdoing I can have no recourse to a *because* (it is because I was born this way, or because I was neglected as a child, etc.) The fact that I am ultimately responsible for my actions

[120] *The Politics of Friendship*, p. 37.
[121] Throughout this section we have been speaking for the sake of clarity and simplicity as if there were only two participants in this relationship, but this is of course an oversimplification and an idealisation. Indeed Derrida stresses that it is 'certainly more than two, always more than two'. Telepathy, p. 228.

and am not a mere causal mechanism *is* the condition of freedom. Furthermore, only *I* can take responsibility for myself, which is of course the condition and definition of responsibility. So freedom, responsibility and selfhood are all here inextricably intertwined. Indeed, as Derrida puts it in *The Gift of Death*, through readings of Jan Patočka, Levinas and Heidegger, responsibility is nothing else than the 'experience of one's absolute singularity.'[122] Being responsible *means* experiencing oneself as an irreplaceable individual, in that I cannot pass this responsibility onto anybody else. Derrida grounds the consciousness of responsibility in an experience of death, drawing on Heidegger's (and Patočka's) analysis of death as that which no one can do for me or in my place.[123] It is not as an already established *I* that I take up an attitude or stance towards death, rather the identity of the *I* is bestowed by death: 'My irreplaceability is therefore conferred, delivered, "given," one can say, by death.'[124] Only through this experience of death as *my* death, as uniquely mine, am I constituted as a self that is responsible, and hence free. As we saw in our second chapter, being-possible is the being proper to *Dasein* (I do not *have* possibilities, rather I *am* my possibilities), and death is said by Heidegger to be the pre-eminent possibility, or my '*ownmost nonrelational possibility not to be bypassed*'.[125] Death, then, as Heidegger formulates it, is that which is most *my own* and that which opens the very possibility of ownness, experienced as responsibility. It is death that individuates me as uniquely responsible and as an absolutely distinct, separate subject. Everything throughout

[122] *The Gift of Death*, p. 41.
[123] '*No one can take the other's dying away from him*. Someone can go "to his death for an other." However, that always means to sacrifice oneself for the other "*in a definite matter*." Such dying for… can never, however, mean that the other has thus had his death in the least taken away. Every Dasein must itself actually take dying upon itself. Insofar as it "is", death is always essentially my own. And it indeed signifies a peculiar possibility of being in which it is absolutely a matter of the being of my own Dasein. In dying it becomes evident that death is ontologically constituted by mineness and existence.' Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 223 (240.)
[124] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 41.
[125] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 232 (250-1.)

my life that I can do, think or say could conceivably be done, thought or said by another. Death, as my own death, is the one 'experience' that can be undergone by each of us alone. So nowhere do I experience my uniqueness and unsubstitutability except in death, in which 'all relations to other Dasein are dissolved'.[126] Since nobody can die in my place nobody can ever take over my experience, or know first-hand 'what-it-is-like' to be me. If we were not finite beings, burdened with the knowledge that one day we will die, this limitation to one's own experience and perspective would not bear upon us, but this is because there would be no *I* as such.

This then, at base, would constitute the abyss or gap between one subject and another. The impossibility of 'really knowing' the other's mind is the impossibility of giving, taking or assuming the other's death. No *unus mundus*, no telepathy could ever overcome this gap without destroying us along with it. For what each of these concepts affirm is the possibility of a *shared* knowledge or experience, and this indeed puts into question the privacy of any specific experience and the extent to which any of my thoughts, ideas, opinions and affective sentiments could be said to be decidedly my own: in all of these aspects my place can be taken by another. However, death, responsibility, freedom, are the point at which my experience *becomes* my own, that is, uniquely singular and distinct from that of the other.

Insofar as nobody can take responsibility for me (as in take over *my* responsibility) or die for me (in the sense of dying in my place, taking my death away from me) then each person's experience is indeed, as Nietzsche holds, 'incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual'. Firstly, since responsibility (qua

[126] Ibid., p. 232 (259.)

experience of selfhood) is always mine alone it cannot be compared with anyone else's. We may speak of collective or shared responsibility, but in the final instance it remains only mine. As Kierkegaard insists, I cannot appeal to general or universally applicable laws to guide or justify my behaviour, for this would be an abrogation of my own singular responsibility. Levinas, paraphrasing a character from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, often writes 'All men are responsible for one another and I more than anyone else'.[127] Thus my responsibility is incomparable because I am *more* responsible than the other: *my* responsibility is all that I can speak about and so it cannot be compared or weighed up against another's. As soon as I factor in the other's responsibility (towards me for example), I disavow my own responsibility towards him, introducing calculation and scheming into my behaviour. Furthermore, '[how] can I admit his responsibility for me without immediately finding myself […] responsible for his responsibility itself. To be me is always to have one more responsibility.'[128] It follows that this excess of my responsibility over the other's is an exponential escalation, '*increasing in the measure that it is assumed*',[129] which accounts for the 'infinity' of responsibility. For since responsibility *is* the experience of selfhood itself, there is no point at which I will have had done with it, or discharged myself of it. The moment I am no longer responsible, I am no longer a subject.

However, it will not have escaped notice that there has been a slight but fundamental shift in our account of the uniqueness of responsibility. From resting on an essential solitude (the solitude of death), it has now have taken on an evident

[127] Levinas, 'Philosophy, Justice, and Love', in *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (London & New York: Continuum, 2006) p. 92.
[128] 'A Man-God?', in *Entre Nous*, p.52.
[129] *Totality and Infinity*, p. 244.

sociality. Responsibility for oneself, for one's own actions and behaviour, has passed into responsibility for, and towards, the other. For Levinas never ceases to reproach Heidegger for privileging one's own mortality ahead of all others and insisting upon our necessary separation-in-death. Levinas even suggests that selfhood, or ipseity, derives not from my own death at all but rather from *the other's death*. The upsurge of responsibility that ensues precedes consciousness or free commitment. This is a responsibility even before there is any *I* able to take up or assume that responsibility. It is a responsibility, finally, which did not arise in or from a decision taken by a free subject, but which originates outside of me and assigns me to be a subject. For Levinas, one's singularity as *I* arises through one's being 'chosen without choosing',[130] which is a passivity infinitely more passive than receptivity, since receptivity presupposes a capacity or ability to receive that precedes that which it receives. Consciousness, as Levinas often writes, is inseparable from *activity*: anything that affects consciousness from the outside can always, by its assenting to it, be assumed by consciousness as if it were its own invention. Responsibility to the other, however, cannot be something freely decided upon or assumed by a fully constituted subject, nor can it be something empirically learned through the experience of sharing the world with others. I cannot decide to be or not to be responsible for the other, it is something that falls upon me prior to all decision: 'In the face of the other man I am inescapably responsible and consequently the unique and chosen one.'[131] As such, rather than coinciding with freedom, as we suggested above, responsibility for Levinas *precedes* my freedom,

[130] *Otherwise than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1981) p. 57.
[131] 'Ethics as First Philosophy', in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Blackwell , 1989) p. 84.

and even precedes the *I*, in an 'immemorial past'[132] that cannot be recovered or brought under my spontaneity. It would take us too far from our main problem were we to provide more than this brief sketch of that which is developed over 200 pages in *Otherwise than Being*, but if this hyperbolical responsibility to the other precedes the *I* and calls upon me to be an *I* then we can perhaps understand how 'the death of the other preoccupies the human *being-there* [*Dasein*] before his own death'.[133] Thus, before taking up a position toward my own death I am concerned about, and implicated in, the other's death. Henceforth, death can no longer be thought of as that which annuls or unties all relations to the other and brings me before myself in my 'ownmost nonrelational possibility', but as primarily that which divests me of concern for myself and my own being.

For Levinas, then, it is the other's death that is pre-eminent, and it is concern over the death of the other, over his mortality and vulnerability, that calls upon me to be a subject:

> This would be the *I* of the one who is chosen to answer for his fellowman and is *thus* identical to itself, and *thus* the self. A uniqueness of chosenness! […] The priority of the other over the *I*, by which the human *being-there* is chosen and unique, is precisely the latter's response to the nakedness of the face and its mortality. It is there that the concern for the other's death is

[132] As Levinas describes this immemoriality: 'Here we have, in the ethical anteriority of responsibility (for-the-other, in its priority over deliberation), a past irreducible to a hypothetical present that it once was.' 'Diachrony and Representation', in *Entre Nous*, p. 147.
[133] '"Dying For…"', in *Entre Nous*, p. 188.

> realised, and that 'dying for him' 'dying his death' takes priority over 'authentic' death.[134]

Thus it is still in responsibility, as that which concerns only *me,* that I experience my irreplaceability and uniqueness, but this irreplaceability is awakened in answering to the call of responsibility to the *other* rather than in facing up to my own mortality. Only *I* can answer to it; he addresses *me,* and I cannot defer or avoid this responsibility – even fleeing from it or disavowing it is still responding to it. So it is an *I* that is elected or chosen, born outside of itself, in sociality, rather than an *I* that arises in selfhood from its ownmost possibility, and thus bracketing off social relations. The important point is that, *contra* Heidegger, for Levinas the 'my ownness' of selfhood is derived and secondary, and *the other precedes the I.*

It obviously cannot be a matter of our deciding between one or the other of these two positions, or proving or disproving one or the other. But whichever death precedes the other in terms of priority – whether this is an ethical, ontological or temporal priority, – nothing Levinas can pose in objection to Heidegger can deny the latter's key insight that my concern for the other's death, even if this takes primacy over concern for my own death, cannot lead to my dying that death for him, and as such taking it away from him. Likewise, this priority of the other's death over my own cannot alter the existential fact that it is in every case *my* death that I will die, and never the other's. Even if I were to take a bullet for another, though I may have saved him from dying at this particular moment and thus prolonged his life, I have in no way taken his death away from him or died in his

[134] Ibid., p. 188.

place. Nor have I died or experienced *his* death (meaning that the death that I undergo is not mine but the other's) even if this death (the bullet that kills me) were meant for someone else. And as Derrida puts it,

> Once it is established that I cannot die *for* another (in his place) although I can die *for* him (by sacrificing myself for him or dying before his eyes), my own death becomes this irreplaceability that I must assume if I wish to have access to what is absolutely mine.[135]

Interestingly, the previously discussed film *Brainstorm* attempts to approach this problem of whether one's own death could be taken over or undergone by the other. In the film, one of the researchers has a cardiac arrest in the laboratory while wearing the headset device and thus 'uploads' her death for Christopher Walken's character to experience. Unfortunately at this point the film lapses into ponderous metaphysical fantasy involving some kind of celestial afterlife, and by thus conceiving of death as a passage into another place, and hence as an experience – the *ultimate* experience, in every sense of the word – the real problem is avoided, and the true 'experience' of death as one's '*ownmost nonrelational possibility not to be bypassed*', that is already presupposed and 'understood' in any such metaphysico-theologico-fictional speculation is missed. Admittedly however, it is difficult to conceive of a different route for the film to have taken at this point, since 'death' cannot be represented without dissimulating it as a phenomenon of life. But then, if death cannot be presented, made known, or 'experienced' *at all*, how am I to have this immediate encounter with my death – as my most proper

[135] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 43-4.

possibility – that individuates me as an irreplaceable subject? This is the problem Derrida raises in *Aporias*: if death is, as Heidegger often phrases it, the possibility of the impossibility of *Dasein* – the possibility of *Dasein*'s 'no-longer-being-able-to-be-there'[136] – would this be possibility as impossibility, or impossibility as possibility? The two alternatives are not interchangeable, for while the former cancels or annuls itself as possibility (possibility would be precisely that which is no longer possible), the latter still appears *within* the space of the possible: impossibility would still be able to appear as such, as something *Dasein* is capable of.

As Derrida suggests, Heidegger's whole existential analytic rests on the latter interpretation, on death being a possibility-of-being that presents itself and '*to which Dasein relates*.'[137] Death, as the very impossibility of all presentation, all appearing – 'the disappearance, the end, the annihilation of the *as such*'[138] – must, for Heidegger's analysis to hold, nevertheless present itself, show itself, or appear to *Dasein* – 'as such.' Even though it is impossibility itself, it must be awaited or anticipated *as possibility* – indeed as our 'ownmost possibility'. It is this experience of death – the paradoxical appearance or presentation of the impossibility of all appearance or presentation – that distinguishes *Dasein* from all other forms of life. But if we can no longer appeal to such an experience how is this distinction to be upheld? For if 'the impossibility of the "as such" is indeed the impossibility of the "as such," it is also what cannot appear as such.'[139] And if animals do not have an

[136] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 232 (250.)
[137] Ibid., p. 231 (250.)
[138] Derrida, *Aporias: Dying – Awaiting (One Another At) the 'Limits of Truth'*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993) p. 75.
[139] Ibid.

experience of, or relation to death as such, 'neither does man, that is precisely the point!'[140]

So perhaps the somewhat clumsy, naïve and unsophisticated representation of the experience of death given in the film *Brainstorm* (as well as any other similar account we would care to mention) cannot necessarily be so clearly distinguished from the authentic, primordial understanding described by Heidegger. While the former resorts to a metaphysics of death, speculating upon what lies beyond, and thus betraying the prior, existential experience of death, the latter likewise relies on death being something that can be presented 'as such' – again, on impossibility appearing as possibility. The demarcation between the metaphysical understanding of death and the more originary or fundamental experience is thus 'untenable', in that 'it cannot even claim to have any coherence or rigorous specificity.'[141] For what could this experience of death be that Heidegger opposes to the inauthentic one? How could we 'relate' to that to which by definition we cannot relate?

So death, as our most proper possibility, which must be assumed or taken up as such, is also, at the same time '*the least proper*',[142] and that to which I *must* relate as what is most my own is also that which is *least* my own, to which I *cannot* relate. This knot cannot be untied by taking Derrida to mean that Heidegger is wrong in his insistence on the 'mineness' of death, for it remains the case that each dies his own death, and that as such it is surely my death that is most properly mine and no-one else's. However, since I cannot relate to my death, it is simultaneously that which is *least* my own and which in fact has nothing to do with me. The most and

[140] Ibid., p. 76.
[141] Ibid., p. 79.
[142] Ibid., p. 71.

the least, the proper and the improper coincide and cannot be resolved into one or the other. There is an original contamination in the space of 'my ownness'. This relation without relation accounts for how we can have such an irresolvable conflict regarding death such as that between Heidegger and Levinas, for both rely on an experience of death *as such* – whether my own or that of the other – that is prior to any empirical knowledge or experience of somebody actually dying. This regression to the most authentic, the most primary or the most original assumes an *a priori*, grounding encounter with death as such. However, if there is *no* such encounter, if man can have no relation with death, then the question as to whose death is primary must remain undecidable. Not only can I never experience the other's death *immediately*, so I can never experience my own death either. Whether it is the other's death or my own death that individuates me as an irreplaceable subject, it is in either case inaccessible so the question remains unanswerable. Just as Heidegger unravels Kant's attempt to establish the stable foundations of finitude (in grounding sensibility and understanding in the imagination), so here Derrida does the same thing to Heidegger. The foundational experience of death that grounds mineness – and the whole existential analysis of *Dasein* – is swept away; again, not by passing to an even more 'radical, originary or fundamental thought',[143] but by denying the possibility of any such foundationalism or fundamentalism.

So there can be no grounding experience of ownness that is not originally impure. The implications for our discussion surrounding telepathy and the other are clear: at precisely that point at which we are most separated from the other, and closest to

[143] Ibid., p. 79.

ourselves, we are furthest away from ourselves. From the beginning, in addition to attempting to discover whether the *I* can ever experience the other's experience, we have also been trying to trace a clear line of separation between that which is *my own* and that which also belongs to the other. While the original communicability, and hence universality, of every thought and experience was conceded, we seemed to have reached the ultimate point of absolute uniqueness and singularity in death. Here, at least, was an 'experience' that was truly mine and which could not be expropriated, but on further investigation this turns out to have been the very essence of expropriation. So if mineness cannot be rigorously grounded or delineated, neither, it seems, can my singularity as distinct from universality. This is of course not to say that I would ever confuse myself with anyone else, or dissolve altogether into generality, but whenever I try to establish *what* it is that distinguishes me from anyone else we reach the aporia that Derrida describes. Just as it cannot be stated whether it is my own death or that of the other which takes precedence, so it cannot be decided whether intersubjectivity or individual, monadic subjectivity comes 'first'. We noted above that from whichever side we decided to start we ran up against a problem when trying to account for the other. When setting out from the presupposition of intersubjectivity, there seemed to be *nothing but* intersubjectivity and when positing individual subjectivity as our point of departure, we inevitably had to negotiate the problem of solipsism. If this is a necessary undecidability then it cannot simply be the case that there is *nothing* that is truly my own, which would mean there is nothing outside the universal. However, nor could it be the case that there is *something* that is truly my own: some isolable, founding property.

Could it be that it is this irresolvable hovering between the two sides that has lain at the root of our whole problem in this chapter? Because the universal is *not all*, this allows us to suppose that there is some nucleus of otherness or uniqueness, outside of generality, that perhaps an absolute telepathic insight (or intellectual intuition) would enable us to access. We saw this repeatedly: language seems necessarily to conceal some secret kernel of selfhood that we each possess individually. However, such a supposition led to the impasse that we reached in our reading of Nietzsche, where the two sides could not be reconciled. There we suggested that either there is an inherent communicability and hence universality already belonging to this true, unique self, which undoes it from within, or there is a total absence of communication between the inner self and the 'herd' self, which leaves us once again with a core of selfhood that is both *most* our own and *least* our own, which has everything and nothing to do with us. This would be a 'self' hidden even from him or her to whom it supposedly 'belongs'.

For Derrida, such an irreducible, absolutely private self is an inescapably theological assumption, necessarily presupposing the infinite insight of God to whom it would show itself. In fact Derrida goes further than this and even suggests that 'God is the name of the possibility I have of keeping a secret that is visible from the interior but not from the exterior.'[144] So in order to assume this inaccessible interiority we must co-posit a place or point of view from which it would be visible, as well as a witness to occupy that position. This witness that is so constituted is '*at the same time other than me and more intimate with me than*

[144] *The Gift of Death*, p. 108.

myself'.[145] So in wishing to gain access to this singular otherness of the other, we are once again striving after the absolute perspective of God, but this is a point of view that is coextensive with the object viewed. In other words, it is a God constituted in order to secure the possibility of this interiority, with each necessarily implying the other. Rather than a transcendent being able to see and know all, God *is* this radical interiority that would allow each of us to withdraw from the universal. This perhaps points towards a different interpretation of intellectual intuition, for if the latter is a cognition whose object, rather than pre-existing it, is originally created in and through that cognition, then here also we have an 'object' (this secret interior self) that only *is* through divine observation, and which can *be* only so long as it is being observed. However, here the relationship is reversed, for it is effectively the object that creates its observer. Only so long as we assume the object itself can there (and must there) be this witness to it. If, as we suggested above, there is *no* property of ownness, then the absolute point of view vanishes with it.

So if there is no unique, singular kernel of selfhood, this desire to see into the other in his or her core of otherness – to gain access to the vantage point of God – will always be frustrated; we will always be on the outside, in the universal, but at the same time knowing that the universal does not account for everything. This, however, is not due to our being unequal to the divine gaze of the Creator, or being incapable of penetrating deeply enough; rather, the very thing that would ensure the unknowability of the other would be that there is nothing (or no thing) there to know.

[145] Ibid., p. 109.

Conclusion

The initial project I had decided to undertake in this work could be summarised as follows: something truly extraordinary appears to be on the horizon: a technology capable of giving positive existence to the contents of the mind and thus overcoming the finite gap between thought and external reality; however, is this really the case? Clearly, then, a certain level of scepticism was predominant from the beginning. As already acknowledged (on p. 9n), the seed from which the present work grew was the extract from Žižek's *The Parallax View* which drove the second chapter. (To repeat: 'In the terms of German Idealism, this means that what Kant called "intellectual intuition" – the closing of the gap between mind and reality, a mind-process which, in a causal way, directly influences reality, this capacity that Kant attributed only to the infinite mind of God – is now potentially available to all of us, that is to say, we are potentially deprived of one of the basic features of our finitude.')[1] A bold, provocative statement, casually made, was to be investigated and subjected to scrutiny. And since the depiction at the beginning of the first chapter of an artist's frustration was borne out of experience, there was an autobiographical stake in these questions from the beginning. Many times while studying as a practicing artist I had fantasied a thaumaturgical power that would allow one's ideas to emerge unspoiled and fully-formed directly from thought, so these technologies seemed suspiciously providential – too good to be true as it were.

[1] In the interests of full disclosure I should perhaps say that I first came across this identical passage in another of Žižek's works, the 'Author's Afterword' to the book of essays entitled *The Universal Exception* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006.)

However, it soon became clear that if the outcome was not to be predetermined in advance it was necessary to move away from the safety of scepticism and rethink the terms of the question, for, as is often the case, the presuppositions in place at the point of departure will to a large extent dictate the destination. It could be said then that by following Žižek and asking whether the finite gap between internal and external could be transcended by means of technology we were always going to be thwarted in this effort due to its underlying assumptions. As stated in the discussion at the end of Chapter Three surrounding Jung and the *unus mundus*, by approaching the problem as an incommensurable gap we foreclose any possibility of the two sides being reconciled. Thus after having reached a certain impassable limit we were compelled to attempt to think the relationship otherwise and so to transcend it by alternative means. This was done, as already noted, because it seemed that unless there is a faculty of the mind that transcends the receptivity constitutive of finitude then no technological appendage can truly have such radical consequences as it may seem at first sight to present.

The rub of course is that once we have traversed this abyssal space by an alternative route in order to secure the technology's radical potential we then find that we no longer need the instrument at all, for that which we had hoped to achieve was, by approaching it from a different vantage point, already achieved. So it seems that either way the prosthesis fails to bridge the gap: if there *is* this insurmountable gulf then no instrument, however advanced, could fully overcome it; but if we can conceive the relationship rather along the lines of a continuum or neutral space then

in effect we already have what we are looking for and the tool is no longer needed.[2] (Furthermore, as has often been insisted, no medium or apparatus can be simply and conveniently effaced or erased from the operation that it performs, so it would be a mistake to leave the interface itself out of consideration when speculating upon the possibility of an immediate coincidence of internal and external. That which facilitates this immediacy – if immediacy it is – will always intervene in the procedure and the art created or the desires fulfilled are not merely passively enabled but are actively shaped and affected by this technological intermediary.)

However, it may perhaps have seemed as if our musings on telepathy have marked something of a retreat from the precipice initially approached in the previous chapter. There, in the final subdivision of Chapter Three entitled 'Synchronicity and the Unus Mundus', we appeared to abandon caution in favour of a more adventurous speculative approach, breaking with the theme of a melancholy finitude forever at one remove from reality and embracing a form of metaphysical monism. So where does our fourth and final chapter sit in relation to what has been accomplished in the pages immediately preceding it? Essentially this is a question as to the relationship between intersubjectivity and ontology, or, the respective approaches to the two 'gaps'.

What Jung posits under the name of *synchronicity* is that there exists a form of intuited content (or '"immediacy" of psychic images') that is neither 'received' nor 'produced' by the subject. The event of synchronicity is the acausal co-occurrence

[2] It should perhaps be reiterated that none of this is put forward as a critique of the technologies themselves, as if one were imprudent enough to suggest that all of the work being done in this field is in vain. The immensely beneficial consequences such capabilities will have on a practical level cannot be underestimated, in particular for people with physical disabilities. It will be clear, however, that our enquiries here have been centred on a more essential, ontological level.

of separate manifestations – psychical and physical – of the 'same living reality.' Could a similar statement, with certain precautions, not be made about the form of telepathy that we have arrived at? For we have suggested, via Derrida, that telepathy is not that which will enable me to break out of my own cloistered interior and gain absolute access to the private inner space of another, but is rather that which renders such interiority suspect, necessitating that we reconceive the relationship altogether. This was what lay behind the move from telepathy as it is commonly envisaged to teleiopoesis, which can no longer be considered along the lines of the simple transmission of a message between two or more self-identical subjects; rather, each is changed in and by the liaison. Like synchronicity, this is no longer a question of *activity and passivity* but of a quasi-mysterious sharing or sympathy. So when we described the relationship as a form of symbiosis in which each subject gives birth to something that none possess individually we could perhaps consider this too as being the *respective manifestations* – in me and in the other(s) – *of the 'same living reality'*. There is thus no stable dividing line between me and the other, for telepathy (or teleiopoesis) undermines the very notion of a fully constituted, separate, self-contained subject. As we saw, *even death*, that ultimate punctuation point, cannot be the locus at which this relationship is stabilised and the identity of the subjects firmly fixed and isolated.

Admittedly, the space for convergence between Derrida and Jung here is small and contestable, and has involved a certain bending of terminology, as well as a degree of revisionism in our reading of Jung. For this '*same'* (living reality) is no doubt not '*the same*' in each case. While synchronicity involves a bifurcation of what is essentially *one*, there is no 'essence' or 'identity' of what takes place in

telepathy/teleiopoesis that is (subsequently or simultaneously) instantiated in separate subjects, as if it were a self-identical, transpersonal 'content'. We have already shown that the unus mundus hypothesis, while offering a way out of the impasse between thought and object, has little to say regarding the intersubjective 'gap' or relation. Thus the final question in our third chapter, which led into our discussions around telepathy, asked: if the gap between *thought* and *that which is given to thought* no longer holds sway, what about the multiple 'sites' or 'instances' of thought? Does it follow that we are all in some sense 'the same' on this antecedent substratum that is prior to the differentiation of thought and being? Yet if this is so how do we account for the splitting into multiplicity and the emergence of individuation? Here we meet once again with the question of universality and singularity that has been our guiding question for much of the final chapter. As we have already noted, while *unus mundus* posits a certain *shared, universal* structure of experience, there must nevertheless remain the contrary aspect of singularity and difference, unless we all are to dissolve into oneness. This is why the outcome of our discussion on telepathy has been rather more ambiguous than that reached in the third chapter, for this lack of a stable point of separation between subjects and the reduction of distance does not amount to a *neutral unity*. As already stated, the gap here is simultaneously *reaffirmed as it is undermined*. Applying a familiar locution of Derrida's we might say that '*there is*'[3] mineness, interiority, separation, but that this is not a limit that can be touched or delineated: that which individuates me and keeps me at an infinite distance from the other is not a thing, a quality, a property, or an 'experience'. In fact we can take the next step and say that it *is* the

[3] Cf., for example *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), where we read that '*there is* gift' (p. 10) – i.e. outside of the circle of economic exchange – but 'the gift does not *exist* and does not *present* itself.' (p. 15.)

fact that there is no such thing, quality, property or experience that ensures the finite gap of unknowability between subjects.

Finitude thus returns, but it is no longer a negatively defined finitude of lack or diminution, positing a reality that we are forever separated from. Nor is it characterised in opposition to a limit concept, say of intellectual intuition, in which (or in whom) this lack is overcome. For the very idea that there is something *more*, something *private*, that telepathy would enable us to gain access to, is precisely what must be abandoned.

So each time there was something that appeared to be definitively out of reach, a '*great outdoors*' separated from a closed interior, and each time, albeit in different ways, we have shown that this is not necessarily the case. In the first instance we did this by *annulling the separation itself* and in the second by *refusing the very idea that there is 'something' that we are separated from or that we could reach: something positive and self-identical*. So again, only so long as we dream of overcoming finitude via technology does it present itself to us as something *in need of being overcome*. We have already seen that the idea that the other hides an irreducibly secret self from me necessarily assumes the existence of a divine observer who can see what I cannot. Likewise, the idea that we are permanently distanced from reality, as Meillassoux has shown, not only provides a space for but seems actively to encourage the thought of a deity to fill that gap. *So by thus denying the gap, in its different ways, we are not attaining to the position of the divine observer and by doing so attaining the faculty of intellectual intuition, but actually denying the possibility of any such infinite vantage point or faculty*.

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